

Eagles soar with Krack of the bat

Written by Jim Ecker

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Yogi Berra, a Hall of Fame catcher with the New York Yankees more than a half-century ago, once declared that you can't think and hit at the same time.

Kirkwood slugger Haylee Krack heartily agrees.

Krack walloped five homers in two games last Saturday at a tournament in Missouri. She belted two homers and drove in four runs against Carl Albert, then collected three homers and 10 RBIs against Oklahoma A&M.

She wasn't looking for a particular pitch or trying to work the count in her favor. Like Yogi, she tried to keep it as simple as possible.

"I felt clear-headed," she said Friday. "I don't think much. It's all reactions from muscle memory.

"It was just a great day. I felt good and I was having fun."

See ball. Hit ball.

"Yeah, pretty much," she claimed.

Krack, a third baseman from Silvis, Ill., hit 17 homers and drove in 55 runs for Kirkwood Community College last season as a freshman in 56 games. She already has eight homers and 25 RBIs in 15 games for the sixth-ranked Eagles (12-3) this year.

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"I never thought she'd be a big home-run hitter," said Kirkwood Coach Joe Yegge. "I thought she was going to be a finesse kid, maybe hit six or seven a year.

"She hit 17 last year and shocked me, but what she's doing now doesn't shock me. She works hard."

Kirkwood hit 99 home runs in 56 games last year, which is nearly two per game. The Eagles are on a similar pace this season with 26 homers in 15 contests.

Kayla Tatge, who hit 20 homers in 2012, has six this season. Freshman Krysta Tutsch has four homers and sophomore Kristen Winter has three. The Eagles have a team batting average of .354, and there's power up and down the lineup.

"Once you have more (power hitters), then it's harder for them to pitch around me," said Krack. "That's how I was in high school. I got pitched around so much.

"Then I came here and almost half the team are power hitters. I really like it. It's exciting. And I know I can rely on them to help."

Krack is serious about keeping it simple. She'll pull an inside pitch or sock an outside pitch to the opposite field. She'll swing at the first pitch she sees if it looks good.

That's what happened last Saturday.

"I felt like they were right there," she said. "I don't think a lot. I like to make contact. I like seeing the ball off the bat. And I was just seeing it good that day.

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"I am probably the most relaxed hitter you'll ever see when I go in there. It's all about seeing the pitch come in."

Krack also felt good the next day, cracking two more homers against the Central Methodist junior varsity. That gave her seven home runs in four games.

"I feel great," she said. "Last year at this time I was struggling quite a bit. And now that I'm getting going already, I'm really excited to get into our season."

"I know the pitching I'm going to see is about the same pitching we've been seeing already, so I'm pretty pumped and hopefully I'll top what I did last year. I'm really looking forward to it."

"This is the best shape I've been in my whole life," she said. "It really helps working hard in the weight room. That helps a lot."

Krack got an early start in softball.

"When I was going through Coach-Pitch, I loved it," she said. "Since I was like 7 or 8, I've been playing competitive ball."

She also was a top bowler at United Township High School in East Moline, Ill., and could have bowled in college, but she wanted to stick with softball. She plans to play at a four-year school next year but is still sifting offers and planning visits.

"I have quite a selection," she said. "There are quite a few schools that are interested in me."

Kirkwood compiled a 42-13-1 record last year but did not make the national tournament. Krack thinks the Eagles have the talent to make it this season.

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"I love this team so much," she said. "We're so much closer than we were last year as a group. We have so much talent. I feel so confident with them. I'm really excited."