

Simpson puts 'teeth' into No .4 Eagles

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 03 May 2016 04:48 -



Nicky Simpson lost two of her front teeth in a bullpen accident earlier this season, but it hasn't kept the All-American pitcher from enjoying another terrific year with the Kirkwood Eagles.

And make no mistake, the sophomore from Conrad has had plenty to smile about - despite the missing teeth.

Simpson tossed another strong game Monday as the fourth-ranked Eagles belted Iowa Lakes, 14-3, in five innings in the championship game of the NJCAA Division 2 Region XI-A softball tournament at Kirkwood.

Simpson raised her record to a sparkling 27-2 as Kirkwood cruised into the district tournament this weekend at home.

The Eagles (54-4) are riding a 30-game winning streak with their lusty hitting and strong pitching. And if they win the district title, they'll make another trip to the national tournament in Mississippi this month.

Simpson was warming up to pitch the second game of a doubleheader against DMACC on March 26 at Kirkwood when the accident occurred. The first game was still in progress and when she turned her head to check on the action, a return throw from the bullpen catcher struck her square in the mouth.

"It was a freak accident," she said. "Broke both of my front teeth. I opened my mouth up and the teeth just fell into my hand."

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Simpson was scrubbed as the Game 2 pitcher that day and hurried to St. Luke's Hospital with her parents. Allie Mengler subbed for Simpson and helped Kirkwood win an important game, and Simpson returned to the ballpark before it was over with a big bag of ice on her mouth.

"It didn't feel good, but they numbed it up at the emergency room," she said. "A lot of swelling and a fat lip."

Simpson has delayed her dental repairs until after the season, so there's still a gap where the rest of her smile used to be. She's a tough customer, however, and is simply delighted with how the Eagles are doing this year.

"I feel awesome," she said. "Our offense is really on and so is our defense, so we're just on a roll."

Kirkwood won its three games in the regional tournament by a combined tally of 38-4, with all three victories stopped in the fifth inning by the eight-run mercy rule. Simpson pitched two of those games and is sitting with a 2.00 ERA and 152 strikeouts in 168.2 innings.

Simpson ranks second in the country with her 27 victories and is 47-8 during her two-year career at Kirkwood. She was named a second team All-American last season and is making a strong bid for first-team honors this year.

Simpson will continue her softball career next season at Truman State, where she plans to major in psychology. She'd also like to get a master's degree in counseling.

Kirkwood dumped Iowa Lakes, 9-1, in the semifinals Monday morning. Maddie Hansen went 3-for-3 with a home run and three RBIs. Teagan Toft was 2-for-3 with a home run and two RBIs. Taylor Nearad was 2-for-2 with two RBIs, two walks and two stolen bases. Mengler also had two hits.

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Lexi Kinnaird (23-2) pitched a three-hitter for the Eagles in that game.

Iowa Lakes rallied for an 11-8 victory in eight innings over Southwestern in the loser's bracket finals to earn another shot at Kirkwood in the championship round, but the Lakers were no match again for Simpson and the Eagles.

Morgan Frost and Payton Mercer belted home runs for Kirkwood in the championship game. Mercer was 3-for-4 with three RBIs. Frost was 3-for-4 with two RBIs. Gabi Carter was 3-for-4, Hansen went 2-for-3 with four RBIs and Toft was 2-for-2.

Kirkwood will host the Region 13 champion in the district tournament that begins Saturday.