

Young Eagles soar to national tourney

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 06 May 2016 20:15 -



Maddie "Mad Dog" Hansen has a sore back and other minor ailments from catching all 60 games for the Kirkwood softball team this season, but she's a major reason the fourth-ranked Eagles are heading back to the national tournament.

Hansen enjoyed a special day Friday as the young Eagles spanked Dawson, 10-2 and 15-3, in the NJCAA Division II district tournament at the Kirkwood diamond.

The national tournament is scheduled for May 18-21 in Clinton, Miss.

Hansen went 5-for-6 with two doubles, a pair of two-run homers and eight RBIs as the Eagles won their 32nd straight game and raised their impressive record to 56-4.

Hansen belted a two-run homer in her first at-bat in the first game, then socked another two-run homer in her second at-bat into an Evergreen tree in deep left-center field. She added an RBI single to finish the opener 3-for-3 with two homers and five RBIs.

Hansen collected a sacrifice fly, a double and a two-run double in the nightcap before grounding out to shortstop.

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Just think if the Cedar Rapids Jefferson grad were completely healthy.

"I took an ice bath last night. That always helps," Hansen said after the Eagles clinched the district title on a warm afternoon in southwest Cedar Rapids.

"Last night was my coldest one. I didn't realize how much ice I put in. It got down to 40 degrees, so it was pretty cold, but it was worth it. When I got out, everything was pink."

Hansen has been taking these ice-baths on a regular basis, although 40 degrees was probably the coldest yet.

"I've learned to appreciate them," she said. "I think they refresh my body."



Hansen lifted her batting average to .473 with 19 home runs and 89 RBIs for Kirkwood, which has one of the best-hitting clubs in the country. Hansen's first home run Friday was the 100th for the Eagles this year and they finished the day with 102 in 60 games.

Hansen was not the only star for the Eagles Friday. Freshman Lexi Ferrari went 6-for-8 in the doubleheader with two doubles, five RBIs and a walk-off double in the opener. And Taylor Nearad, another rookie, was 3-for-6 with a home run and four RBIs, sending her to nationals with a .611 batting average, 27 home runs and 121 RBIs.

Morgan Frost went 2-for-4 in the second game with three RBIs and Teagan Toft was 2-for-3.

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Nicky Simpson (28-2) and Lexi Kinnaird (24-2) provided more strong pitching as the Eagles sent Dawson Community College back to Montana with a 31-10 final record.

The first six batters in Kirkwood's lineup - Nearad, Ferrari, Hansen, Gabi Carter, Frost and Payton Mercer - are all freshmen. Coach Joe Yegge had seven freshmen in the starting lineup in Game 1 and eight rookies in the starting lineup in Game 2. Emilee Meyer, who bats ninth, and Kinnaird are also freshmen.

"These freshmen haven't played like they're young, and I don't expect them to play like they're young down there (at the national tournament in Mississippi)," said Yegge. "Heck, they're even hungrier than they had been when they got here.

"They've been great all year, they've been on an even keel and I think they'll keep doing their job."

Hansen has already signed with Ball State, so this will be her only campaign at Kirkwood. The all-star catcher has been playing like a seasoned veteran and loves hitting in the No. 3 spot in a powerful lineup.

"Freshmen or sophomores, everyone on this club can hit the crap out of the ball," she said. "Everyone is capable of getting that big hit or making that big defensive play."

Ferrari is looking forward to the trip to Mississippi with her teammates.

"It feels great," she said. "We've worked really hard for it."

The Eagles have clobbered most of the competition in the Midwest this season and are averaging 11 runs per game, but they know the games will get tighter at the national

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tournament.

"I think the pitching and the competition will be a lot better," said Hansen. "It will be good for us. I'm excited for it.

"I'm excited to get down there and play our best and see what we do."