

Hansen makes bid for Player of Year

Written by Jim Ecker

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Maddie Hansen used to be a base-clogger. Now she's a base-clearer. And she might be the National Player of the Year as one of the stars for the Kirkwood softball team.

Hansen belted her 18th home run Friday and added to her sterling credentials as the second-ranked Eagles dumped Southwestern, 18-1, to claim the regional title at Kirkwood.

Kirkwood Coach Joe Yegge termed the phrase "base-clogger" to describe Hansen when the All-American catcher arrived on campus in 2015 from Cedar Rapids Jefferson, but that was before Hansen dropped 25 pounds thanks to a heavy diet of racquetball.

"I was pretty slow as a base-runner when I got here," she acknowledged Friday. "I lost a lot of weight my freshman year and I became more athletic, and I think that's helped me get where I am."

It's helped her climb to the top of the charts in junior college softball. Hansen leads the nation with 90 RBIs, is tied for second with 18 homers and ranks fourth in batting with a .537 average.

On top of that, she's an outstanding catcher.

Kirkwood center fielder Taylor Nearad was honored as the National Player of the Year last season and is having another stellar campaign for the Eagles, leading the country in hits, doubles and runs, but Hansen's power numbers are slightly better.

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So will Hansen succeed Nearad as the National Player of the Year for 2017? Don't bet against it.

"I think it would be pretty cool to get something like that," she said, "but I don't like looking into the numbers and all that kind of stuff. I just do what I do and do it for my team."

She's done it very well, helping Kirkwood compile a flashy 52-4 record heading into the district tournament May 10-11.

Yegge thinks Hansen is a strong candidate for National Player of the Year, but knows there are many outstanding players.



"It's going to be tough," he said. "They're going to look at Taylor's numbers, too."

"Maddie's had a great year," he said. "She's had two great years. She's right up there in home runs and RBIs and all that. The bad thing is, you're going to have two people from the same team in the running."

Hansen hit .455 with 20 home runs and 93 RBIs last season, giving her 38 homers and 183 RBIs in two years.

She bats third in a powerful lineup that has produced 98 home runs in 56 games. The Eagles belted six homers Friday with Lexi Ferrari, Nearad, Hansen, DoniRae Mayhew, Morgan Frost

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and Monika Bevans all belting the ball over the wall.

"It just shows the power that we have," said Hansen. "The homers that we hit today, everyone on our team is capable of it and it will come at any time.

"Teams should be afraid, because they never know what's going to happen."

Kirkwood won its three games in the regional tournament by a combined margin of 50-5 with a 20-0 victory over Southwestern in the first round, a 12-4 verdict over Iowa Lakes and the 18-1 win over Southwestern in the finals.

Hansen had a good career at Cedar Rapids Jefferson, but she's had a great career at Kirkwood. She's spent countless hours in the weight room, but points to the racquetball court as a key factor in her development as a top-notch athlete.

Hansen and a former Kirkwood assistant coach were regulars on the racquetball courts at Johnson Hall last year.

"We played racquetball just about every single day. Before practice, after practice," she said. "It got my feet moving."

And the extra pounds melted away.

"I'd get all sweaty," she said. "You're stuck in a room and it gets warm in there. It gets you going."

Lexi Kinnaird (28-3, 1.30 ERA) pitched a two-hit shutout with eight strikeouts in the championship game. She leads the nation in victories and strikeouts, with 258 whiffs in 178 1/3

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innings.

Southwestern ▯ ▯ **100 00 - 1 2 3**

Kirkwood ▯ ▯ ▯ ▯ **643 5x - 18 17 2**

W - Kinnaird. L - Schiefen.