


Kirkwood softball coach Joe Yegge wasn't sure who to pitch in the regional finals on Sunday because DoniRae Mayhew has battled a sore arm the last few weeks and looked a little wobbly in the regional semifinals on Saturday.

Yegge sent his star a text message Saturday night to get a better feel for the situation.

"Last night I asked her, 'How do you feel?,'" he said Sunday afternoon, "and she goes, 'Give me the ball.'

"I've been waiting two years to hear her say something like that."

Case closed.

"He texted me last night and asked if I wanted the ball for the first game and I was like, 'Of course I do! Is that even a question?," the talented right-hander confirmed.

Mayhew tossed a two-hitter and helped her own cause with a two-run homer as the fifth-ranked Eagles spanked Iowa Central, 11-1, in five innings to capture the regional title at the Kirkwood field.

Kirkwood (46-11) will face Nebraska Central Community College (20-19) in Grand Island, Neb.

this Thursday in a district tournament, with the winner advancing to the NJCAA Division II World Series.

Mayhew (19-3) pitched six innings against Iowa Central on Saturday and got the victory, but she gave up five runs and was not as sharp as usual. Natalie Halvorson was ready to pitch Sunday and would have thrown in the second championship game, if necessary, but the Eagles took care of business in Game 1 and the celebration began.

Mayhew did not pitch for 10 days while giving her right arm a chance to recover.



"The arm is feeling better," said Mayhew, a sophomore who has signed with the Iowa Hawkeyes. "I think the rest has helped it out a little bit. It's still hard to know. You just have to keep pushing through.

"Just tightness that was compressing a nerve, I guess," she explained. "I'm not really sure. That's kind of the main gist of it."

Mayhew was touched for an unearned run in the top of the first inning, but she restored order in the bottom of the first by blasting a two-run homer that hugged the foul pole in left field. She now has 28 homers and 84 RBIs this season, figures that lead all NJCAA Division II players by a wide margin in both categories.

Monika Bevans, playing with a broken bone in one thumb and a torn ligament in the other, hit her 15th homer in the first inning on a long blast to left-center to make it 3-1.

Mayhew cruised from there by retiring 12 of the next 13 batters, allowing only a harmless single along the way. She finished the two-hitter with four strikeouts and no walks.

"Yesterday I was too amped and I was all over the place," she said. "Today I was more settled down and pitching where I wanted it.

"We've had a lot of good times on this field with the sophomores, who are my best friends, and I really wanted to do it for all of them. So it was a lot more emotional today."

Kirkwood was sitting on its 3-1 lead with two outs in the bottom of the fourth inning when the floodgates opened. The Eagles scored eight times with two outs to make it 11-1 and end the suspense.

Skylar Ryan began the rally with a two-out double. Kenady Waugh delivered a two-run double and Iowa Central helped the Eagles by getting a little shaky on defense.

The Eagles dumped a bucket of ice water on Yegge after the game and mingled with family and friends on the Kirkwood field.

"It feels good," Yegge said about taking the regional title. "It always feels good to win this.

"I think the sophomores showed a little grit the last few days. We've been waiting for it and they showed it yesterday and today."

Kirkwood topped Nebraska Central, 9-5, on March 3 in their only meeting this season at an

event in Concordia. Neb. The district tournament is a best-of-3 affair, with two games Thursday and a third game on Friday if necessary.