

Hansen hopes to connect for J-Hawks

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Jefferson senior Maddie Hansen would like to get a few good pitches to hit in the Class 5A state softball tournament Thursday evening in Fort Dodge.

That's not too much to ask, but the all-state catcher did not get much a chance in the opening round Monday when the Linn-Mar Lions gave her four straight intentional walks in a 6-3 Jefferson victory.

The third-ranked J-Hawks (36-7) face second-ranked Johnston (34-4) in the semifinals at 5 p.m. Thursday at Harlan Rogers Park and Hansen is anxious to swing the bat again.

Hansen is one of the most feared hitters in the state with a .504 batting average, 11 home runs and 46 RBIs. Linn-Mar walked her six times in a Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader this year, then walked her four more times at the state tournament.

"It puts me on base for Erin (Kuba) behind me and Kennedy Dighton behind me, and so I'll take a base," said Hansen. "If they want to put me on I'll go for it, because I know my teammates can do the job behind me.

"It doesn't really bother me any more."

Hansen has drawn 34 walks in 42 games this season and has an on-base ratio of 61.4 percent.

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During one of her at-bats Monday against Linn-Mar, she moved up in the batter's box and crowded the plate in hopes of getting a pitch within reach for a base hit. Sure enough, she reached for a pitch that was 18 inches off the plate and fouled it off.

"I knew I'd hit it foul," she said with a smile.

Otherwise, all 16 of the other pitches she saw that day from Linn-Mar were beyond reach. "It is a sign of respect, and I respect them for that," she said.

Linn-Mar Coach John Begley did not want anything to do with Hansen this year. In fact, he had a friendly conversation with Jefferson Coach Brian Erbe about his tactics.

"I was talking to Brian about that last week," Begley said after Monday's game in Fort Dodge. "He said he agrees with me walking her. He said, 'If I were coaching against her and the bases were loaded with one out, I'd still walk her.'"

Linn-Mar pitched to Hansen once in the MVC doubleheader and she socked a double to deep center field at Linn-Mar's spacious ballpark.

"Sure I have respect for her," said Begley. "She's good."

Alyssa Olson will be back in the circle for the J-Hawks Thursday after tossing a three-hitter with

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five strikeouts against Linn-Mar. Olson and Hansen have been battery-mates for three years and have reached the state semifinals for the first time in their careers.

Top-ranked West Des Moines Valley (36-6) meets fifth-ranked Waukee (34-8) in the other Class 5A semifinal at 3 p.m. Thursday.

The final round will be played Friday, with the consolation game for third place at 3:30 p.m. and the championship game at 4:45 p.m.