

Cougars top Warriors in soggy affair

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Their season suddenly ended by a downpour, Washington softball coach Erin Jones could not see sending her girls home without anything to show for it.

So before the lights were turned off at Franklin Field Saturday night, she had the whole team spread out on the diamond, pouring quick-dry materials in the infield puddles and raking it smooth and dry.

If nothing else, the clean-up convinced her that the Class 5A regional semifinal game with Kennedy should not have been called after five complete innings with the Cougars awarded a 2-0 victory.

“As you can see,” Jones said, “the field has drained and is playable. The umpires shouldn’t have called it so soon.”

It was, of course, a moot point.

Under sprinkles and black clouds, Kennedy scored a pair of runs in its half of the fifth inning on a hit to right field by Tianna Drahm.

Washington’s effort to catch up was doused when Bria Lenten was called out at third on a fielder’s choice.

Then the rain came, in sheet after sheet for the next 15 minutes.

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And the umps declared it over.

"I feel bad for them," said Cougar Coach Dan Gratz, who will take his Cinderella team (27-13) to Pleasant Hill Tuesday to face third-ranked Southeast Polk with a state tournament berth on the line.

"I hate for it to finish like that. But the umpires kept us informed all along what might happen with the rain coming," he said.

As the skies kept getting darker after a sunny 7 p.m. start, neither team produced much offense.

The Cougars got their first ball out of the infield against Warrior pitcher Payton Bruner in the third inning when Drahn pulled a double down the right-field line.

Washington came back with its first and only hit off Cougar hurler Jenna Schwartzhoff in the bottom of the third on a line single to right by Caiti Peterson.

"Jenna was just awesome tonight," Gratz said of his freshman fireballer. "She's gained so much maturity as the season has gone. And tonight, she just shut them down."

As for the crucial fifth inning, the first-year coach said "We just played our game" as they manufactured runs on "small ball."

With one out, pinch-hitter Megan Weber walked and stole second. Katelyn Dye bunted her way on base and kept going to second with no one covering.

After a pop-up for the second out, Drahn sliced a blooper to right that the Warrior fielder dove for and had in her glove before it bounced out as two runs scored.

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"I just kind of slapped it," said Drahn. "If she would have caught it, it would have been a great catch. And it would have been the third out without scoring."

But it fell for a hit, and that was what the Cougars needed.

"It was a clutch hit," said Gratz, a gift from his spunky leadoff batter on the eve of his 25th birthday.

For the Warriors, who closed their turnaround season at 22-17, it was a bitter ending.

"Taking nothing from Kennedy," Jones pointed out. "They got one big hit at a crucial time. In softball that's all it takes. I hate for it to end this way for my seniors."

"I'm disappointed. But I couldn't be more proud of these girls. They've fought hard all year. This will build a fire for next year."