

Softball punches ticket to championship

By **John William Howard**
Sports Editor

By the time the fifth inning rolled around, it wasn't even a game anymore. Clackamas Community College pitcher Noelle Wright bobbled the softball in her hand, two outs remaining. The Mt. Hood Community College bench had stopped their chanting. Even they knew that the game was over, as they trailed 20-6 and tiptoed the edge of elimination. As head coach Jessica Buel shouted to "finish this," Wright threw the pitch. The batter connected, sending the ball directly into the glove of left fielder Caitlyn Frasier, ending the inning.

The Clackamas players didn't scream and shout, but calmly made their way to home plate for post game pleasantries. Their dominant victory over Southern Region rival and three-time defending NWAACC champion Mt. Hood earned them something more important: a birth in the NWAACC title game for the first time since 2007.

However easy the win over Mt. Hood might have seemed, it was the last piece in a long road to the finals and the fifth elimination game in a row that Clackamas had to win.

The tournament began on Friday, May 18 at Delta Park in Portland, where Clackamas easily dispatched Shoreline Community College in a five-inning, 8-0 victory. In the second round, just a few hours later, the Cougars struggled to get their bats working against Mt. Hood in their first meeting. They found themselves down 3-2 in the top of the seventh inning with two outs and runners on first and third. McKenzie Marshall's grounder was picked up by the Saint's pitcher and thrown to first, handing Clackamas their first loss of the double elimination tournament and sending them to the loser's bracket.

Clackamas came back the next day, knowing that losing any one of the three games they had scheduled would eliminate them from the competition.

Clackamas started the next day against Pierce College, and led 6-2 after five innings. Marshall, who started the game as pitcher, struck out one batter for the first out of the fifth inning. On the next at bat with two runners on base, Ashley Bezdicsek of Pierce knocked the first pitch out of the park for a three run homer, making a game of things yet again. Marshall smiled and handed things off to Wright, who closed out the game and iced



Clackamas players cheer together after beating Bellevue 5-4 in the bottom of the seventh inning. Tasha Silvius hit a walk off single to drive Katie Aden home, ending the inning.

the 6-5 victory for the Cougars.

Treasure Valley Community College was next up for Clackamas, who kept things rolling with a 9-0 rout of the Chukars to advance to the final game of the day, where they would face the Douglas College Royals. Marshall pitched three innings for the Cougars, giving up seven hits and three runs before being relieved by Wright. Clackamas gave up just one more run in the final four innings and scored three more of their own, getting the 6-4 victory.

It was the end of a long day for Wright, who started a

game of her own and closed out two others. Wright said she had a good day, and that she never lost confidence in her teammates even when the opposition made a rally.

"We knew we could hold 'em," Wright said.

Despite the next day's cooler weather, a heated battle raged Sunday morning between Clackamas and Bellevue College. Bellevue, who swept the league's Northern Region with ease, jumped out to an early lead with four runs in the top of the first inning. Clackamas mounted their comeback in the third, scoring a three run homer from Tasha Silvius to make it 4-3. Megan Malvick scored on a double in the fifth inning to tie the game. The score held, and both teams found themselves tied and facing elimination in the bottom of the seventh.

Clackamas hit trouble getting things going in the inning, and had just Katie Aden on

base with two outs. Then Silvius sent a single to center field and Aden took off, rounding second and third before sliding home and bringing her teammates shouting from the dugout.

The Cougars celebrated for a short time, but soon turned their attention to the slug fest taking place next door between Mt. Hood and Lower Columbia. LCC eventually won 21-16, coming from behind and exhausting each of Mt. Hood's pitchers. That set up the game between Mt. Hood and Clackamas to be a one sided blowout and making the way clear for Clackamas' appearance in the NWAACC championship.

Clackamas will face Lower Columbia for the NWAACC championship on Wednesday, May 23 at 2 p.m. Because Lower Columbia has not lost yet in the tournament, Clackamas must win two games to claim a title.



Above left: Sophomore McKenzie Marshall pitches during the game against Pierce College on Saturday, May 19. Marshall started two games for Clackamas on Saturday and two on Sunday.



Middle: Noelle Wright looks to close out the game against Mt. Hood. Clackamas won the game 20-6, knocking Mt. Hood from the tournament and advancing to the NWAACC championship game.

Bottom right: Freshman Elise Breshears slides in to home plate during the game against Pierce on Saturday, May 19. Clackamas beat Pierce 6-5 in the first of five consecutive elimination games that the Cougars won.



All photos by John William Howard *The Clackamas Print*

Clackamas vs. Lower Columbia on Wednesday, May 23 at 2 p.m. at Delta Park, Portland.