

Sports

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Cougars fastpitch defies injury, gets win



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, *Illinois Valley News*)

Emma Deters makes contact during the second game against Lakeview Friday, April 29. The girls went 1-1 on the day, winning the first and narrowly losing the second.

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

On Easter weekend, the Lady Cougars fastpitch team earned its first win in a double-header at St. Mary's High School April 23.

They did it again Friday, April 29, beating Lakeview 12-11 in overtime play after a comeback and an injury to one of their lead pitchers, Cindy Moore.

"I think the girls are just getting it," said girls' head coach Cathy Pope. "They're at the point where something lights up, the switch goes on and they're understanding the game, absorbing the information we've been giving them."

With Moore out from a direct hit by a Lakeview line drive early in the first game, Thea Barker-Cortrecht ended up pitching both games Friday.

In game two, the IVHS softball team fell behind again ear-

ly, and this time didn't quite catch up, losing 7-9. But in the loss, left-handed batter Keyanna Augustadt hit a home run while others scored in a second comeback effort.

Part of the team's recent success could be tied to extended practices, in which Pope says softball players are learning new positions instead of just focusing on their favored spot on the field.

"Every practice we learn something new," Pope said. "[Lately] we have worked on defensive angles...broadening our view of where the ball is at all times as well as pushing our batting, now that fundamentals of defense are getting under control."

According to Pope, many freshman players took time out of their weekend April 30 in a pitching clinic, where younger athletes had the chance to develop skills in an unfamiliar area.

"We have such a young group and there's such potential, I want everybody to get a chance to learn something new," Pope said.

On any team, cohesiveness plays a fundamental role, boosted in part by team bonding activities. The morning of April 30, Pope said the whole team met together for breakfast to help get in the right mindset.

"We spend a lot of time together and I think that helps them get to know each other as a team and as people," Pope said. "It's really developing into a family-type atmosphere."

The IVHS softball team was scheduled to play another double-header at Cascade Christian starting at 4 p.m. Friday, May 6, where the team hopes to continue building confidence.

"I'm proud of where they're at right now, and their mindset," Pope said. "Everybody out there just loves [softball]. That's something you can't really coach or teach."

Cougar baseball battles back, gets fourth straight win

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

A tenth-inning victory against Rogue River on April 26 might have redefined the season for the Cougars baseball team, which is 5-11 overall and 4-2 in the league as of May 2.

Illinois Valley edged out Rogue River 5-4 last Tuesday, overcoming a few early errors to clamp down on pitching and gain hits when they needed them most.

"We made good plays when we needed to make them," said head coach Bob Johnson. "[Curtis] Paulson pitched all ten innings and did an excellent job on the mound."

Johnson said Rogue River's starting pitcher was a second-team All State player last year, giving Illinois Valley confidence that they could combine strong defense and offense and hold their own against teams of any skill level.

"I think this was a big thing in our season because...[the Cougars] showed they could play a good team and eventually outlast them," Johnson said. "I think we came of age a little bit. It gave us a pretty good boost of confidence and we needed it then."

On Friday, April 30, Illinois Valley played Lakeview in a double-header at home, winning the first 6-4 and taking control of the second, 12-2.

Johnson said Bryan Biggs pitched the first game against the Honkers, striking out five in the win. In the second, Zach Anderson had three hits including a double, and freshman Seth Arias had possibly his best game so far with two doubles.

"That's part of the reason we're starting to win now: some of the young guys are getting to the point they know what they need to do," Johnson said. "Not only are they contributing, they're playing a lot better in the outfield."

Johnson said the team has had to overcome losing the first game in the double-header against St. Mary's April 23. They've been practicing hitting and continuing to refine the basics so the foundation for their games can be strong.

Illinois Valley has also worked on strengthening its on-field defense, such as forcing double-plays for quick outs, as the Cougars vie for a playoff spot.

"Our hitting is coming around gradually," Johnson said. "When you get all the fundamentals down, sooner or later they can gel as a team and play together; it seems like we're starting to do that now."

The Cougars last played Cascade Christian April 19, and hope to win both games in the upcoming double-header May 6. The Challengers are 11-5 overall and 5-1 in the league as of May 2.



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, *Illinois Valley News*)

#4 senior Zach Anderson safely reaches second base during the home game against Lakeview.