

Sports

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Cougars' fastpitch win in final play



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, Illinois Valley News)

Senior Sabrina VanTassel wins the game with a close play at the plate in extra innings. St. Mary's fell victim to the Cougs 8-7 Tuesday, May 10 at IVHS.

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

The Illinois Valley High School fastpitch squad continued its end of season surge with an 8-7 victory over St. Mary's Tuesday, May 10 in overtime.

Both teams have come a long way from the last time they faced each other April 23, in a double-header where IVHS won the first and lost the second.

On May 10, athletes made big plays on the field as well as behind the plate. But with increased experience and a better overall knowledge of the game, the Lady Cougars showed flexibility and improved skill — plus a little bit of luck.

"The game was amazing," said lead coach

Cathy Pope. "I think the girls wanted it more... we worked [in practices] on base running and strategic plays. We don't always have to hit; in the end, I had somebody sacrifice bunt, which was pretty scary for sure. It doesn't always work out. But it worked out this time."

Illinois Valley first took the lead 2-1, but in the second inning St. Mary's scored four runs in a surge. The Lady Cougars answered with another three runs to tie it up.

After one run each in the fifth, it became a 6-6 game. Neither team's pitcher yielded much more than a base hit. Several players would hit fouls, only to have a pop fly caught by the defense or a runner tagged out.

But according to Pope, the team has learned another important element separating good teams from better ones.

"I think they're learning to trust me," Pope said. "Being told to steal or bunt isn't always the best option in their minds, but they trust in me. Sometimes I haven't made the right decision, but when I tell them [to go for it], they do it wholeheartedly."

In the final inning, Lady Cougars stayed levelheaded under pressure, even when facing one or two strikes against them. The winning play didn't come from a series of hits or a home run out of the park. Instead, a sacrifice bunt helped Van Tassel slide home just in time, called safe by the umpire for a Cougar win.

"It's really hard to stay focused in the box and be disciplined [when you're down], sometimes you're taking half-swings at everything," Pope said. "[Van Tassel] was aggressive on the bases and got some batters

to move her around. Sometimes things work in your favor."

Over the course of the season, an inexperienced Illinois Valley team has had to overcome many obstacles, sometimes playing against older teams in 4-A, 5-A and 6-A schools and making mistakes along the way.

Losing games at any level can make anyone feel down, but according to Pope, they had to make mistakes in order to learn to play the game.

"We battle that sometimes," Pope said. "If one person starts putting herself down...it spreads like wildfire on the field. This was the first game where I think everybody made mistakes and everybody played just as hard going on, which made me feel good to see."

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Cougars gain momentum in blowout



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, Illinois Valley News)

Senior Bryan Biggs on the mound Tuesday, May 10.

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

The Cougars had a rough start to the baseball season, but they've recently turned the tide in league play, winning some important games including a crucial 5-4 victory against Rogue River.

But on Tuesday, May 10, Illinois Valley went from an 0-4 start to beat St. Mary's with a decisive 14-4 score, solidifying their current third-ranked position in the 3-A Southern Cascade league.

According to coach Bob Johnson, the team scored 14 runs on 13 hits with one error in just five innings of play. Few players had multiple hits, but everyone had at least one, and several more scored points.

Zach Anderson was the starting pitcher, giving up four runs but striking out four as

well. Bryan Biggs took over in the third inning and ended with three strikeouts and no runs or walks. According to Johnson, Tony Paulson and Lander Nordal both had three hits, and Tyler Andrews had two.

Illinois Valley's confidence is clearly building, with athletes talking more and encouraging each other on the field and from the dugout.

Johnson believes some recent wins are giving the Cougars increased motivation to continue on the successes of the football and basketball teams earlier in the year.

"They've kind of come together as a team and they care about each other," Johnson said. "They got a taste of winning now — and they like to win. All of this is going to make our school keep getting better. We're going to start getting the attitude that we can play with anybody."

After opening the season against teams from 6-A schools, the Cougars had to overcome some early-season mistakes to find they could in fact hold their own.

Johnson also reiterated the fact that many first-year athletes were fresh from Little League play and finding themselves in a higher-stakes playing field.

"The young guys are going to make some mistakes until we learn," Johnson said. "But we've learned really well. And the older guys are playing pretty well, and they've played well most of the year."

Johnson believes the 2011 team has more depth of talent in their roster than previous years, which could put the Cougars in a good position to make State.

At third in the league, Illinois Valley will have to win a playoff game against

the second-ranked team in the post-season. Though remaining regular-season games might not have much effect on their chance of State play, it will no doubt give the Cougars valuable momentum if they win out.

Johnson said that after the losses to Cascade Christian May 6, the Challengers have all but clinched the first place position. Most likely, Rogue River and Illinois Valley will battle for the second spot.

If they go to State, Illinois Valley could match up against highly ranked teams such as Glide, who is ranked sixth in all of 3-A as of Friday, May 13. But when the Cougars played Glide back in early April, they were only narrowly defeated 4-5 in the second double-header game.

"At State, there are only 16 teams, so anything can happen," Johnson said.

Twilight golf league standings

Week 3. MONDAY NIGHT		
TEAM#	SPONSOR NAME	POINTS
1	True Value	32
2	Muffler Shop	15
3	Taylor's Country Store	26
4	Mike Hohm Productions	22
5	Taylor's Country Store	21
6	Land & Mineral Dev. Grp.	11
7	Dr. Joes Pet Hospital	21
8	Rough and Ready	4
9	BNR	30
10	Self sponsored	29
11	Self sponsored	28

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Lone thrower to represent Cougars

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

The Illinois Valley High School track team wrapped up a season of big improvements and personal records Saturday, May 14 at the Sunset League Special District Meet.

In a league full of tough competition,

track coach Ray Yarbrough said senior Kayla Johnson took first in discus and second in javelin, and will advance to State in both events.

"We only sent one student to State but had a lot of [personal records]," Yarbrough said. "We came in and pushed some people who probably didn't

think they were going to be pushed this much." Senior Jesse Bethke tied with two others in high jump with 5'6" for fourth place. He also did well in discus, but like several other Cougars, he was just short of a State placement.

Celilo Nordal also ran the 1,500-meter race in 4 minutes 56 seconds,

one of several personal records for Illinois Valley. Samantha Milner also slashed her time down to 5:39 in the 1,500-meter race.

Freshman Amanda Brooks finished fourth in the 100-meter dash, short of a State placement but just tenths of a second behind the second- and third-place runners.

"In our league, St. Mary's is a powerhouse program," Yarbrough said, highlighting the difficulty of the 3-A Southern Cascade league in track. "In any other conference [Brooks] would have gone. She's running against the best of the best."

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