

Weather keeps Cougars off the diamond

Jason McMillen
IVN Contributing Writer

Though the record breaking rainfall this year made it harder for the Illinois Valley High School (IVHS) softball and baseball teams to practice, they are pushing through the season to the best of their ability. "Weather was definitely an issue at the beginning of the season and then it went from being super-cold to super-hot," said Beth Boatman, softball coach.

Adding to her statement Jessie Dugas, baseball coach, said that his athletes were having trouble "getting into a groove" this year because they couldn't have comprehensive outdoor practice every day. Dugas explained that they were generally forced to practice indoors or visit the batting

cages when the weather was less than satisfactory. Despite this inconvenience, Dugas reported that the students have improved tremendously throughout the season.

There is about a week and a half left for baseball and softball and both IVHS sports teams have several games lined up, some of which are double headers.

So far, Boatman said that her teams' greatest strength rests in their defensive ability and in this regard they performed admirably throughout the season. However, she made a point to mention that batting was lackluster and plans to focus on that more next year. "A lot of the time I'm by myself coaching," Boatman concluded on the topic, "I've got a few part-time coaches and so we just need some more hands out there with having 20-25 girls in

the program. It's pretty hard to focus on one element with just myself." Boatman added that another full-time coach next year, who can spend as much time as she does with the girls, would be ideal.

On the same topic, Boatman stressed batting practice for their upcoming games, and recording the students individually so that she can critique their form and best show them how to improve.

Dugas, speaking toward some of the season's highlights, said that a few students have shown great feats of skill. Some of the more notable occasions were when Bruce Bruner threw a "no hitter" and when Tanner Davis and Austin Moore hit home runs over the fence. Additionally, Dugas added that they had a large handful of highly competitive and close games. Three

of said games were one-run losses and two other games were two-run losses.

"I'm just proud of the kids," Dugas said in a closing statement.

He continued on by emphasizing that they're not done yet

and that the team is focusing on the next game with their eyes on the prize.

Boatman, also in a closing statement, said that morale is good and that the games are, "always fun" for the girls.



(Photo by Laura Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Bailee Moore (left), Mallorie Menning, Kasey Griffin and McKenzee Engles share a light moment during the home loss against Lakeview Saturday, May 6.

IVHS track team looks to state

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The end of the track season for Illinois Valley High School (IVHS) is fast approaching with only the district event set for May 12 and 13 and the state competition for the following weekend. Coach Paul Jackson said that the team currently has four aspiring state-level competitors: Roza Jonas, Nathan Klais, Tylar Blind and possibly Aarika Brooks. Jonas is attempting to compete in the 800 meter while Klais is going for the discus event. Blind has his sights set on three events: the 3000 meter, the 800 meter and discus.

Aarika Brooks, a sophomore who might be able to go to the state competition for javelin, has colleges investigating her. Although this is her first season of track, Brooks has placed among the top five every meet for the 100 meter and 200 meter events. She also plays soccer and basketball.

All four of these prospective state athletes have placed in the top five more than once during regular events.

Jackson added that several of the freshmen are also looking promising if they decide to stay with the program and specialize in an event.

Speaking toward the future, Jackson admitted that there hasn't really been a concrete track program built at IVHS and that, before the IVHS track was built around three years ago, the teams would practice at Lorna Byrne Middle School or on the blacktop. Further elaborating, Jackson said that the current coaches are looking into implementing some changes so that future coaches can just jump into the program and have a plan already established.

This year, the IVHS track team has three coaches while it only had two last year. According to Jackson, three coaches is a bare minimum. "It's just become more stringent and more regulated," Jackson said, "There's a lot of hoops to jump through just to volunteer your time to help these kids. You can't just show up." Jackson added that he would like to see some of the regulations dropped but he doesn't see that happening for the foreseeable future.

Though the team started the year with a healthy 38 students the numbers have dwindled throughout the season and is now down to around 25. Some of the attrition rate Jackson attributes to attitude problems in that some of the students simply did not want to be coached. "I think that's kind of a sign of the times," Jackson concluded on the topic.

Like all other outdoor sports this year the team has suffered from a lack of regular practice due to the record breaking amount of rainfall. "We had to fight a little bit with softball and baseball. Everybody wants the gym when it's raining. We haven't been able to run on the grass either," Jackson said. Continuing on his point he said that, typically, it's best to start the athletes running on grass to condition their shin and leg muscles as opposed to immediately pounding on the track or concrete. As a result of the marshy grass areas being unfit for use, the team had to deal with shin splints this year.

Although there has been some obstacles, Jackson said of his ultimate goal, "I want everybody, first and foremost, to learn something out here and have some fun. I want them to take an experience away with them for the rest of their life."

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