

CHAMPIONS *from B1*

Left: Nicki Derrick delivers a pitch against the Trojans on Friday. Top: Shortstop Halli Vaughn fields a grounder and records an out at first in the seventh inning. Bottom: Hope Ward lays down a bunt. PHOTOS BY ZACH SILVA/CG SENTINEL

going to happen,” said lead-off hitter Sofia Alcantar. “As soon as she started throwing, we were perfectly fine.”

After Alcantar’s pop fly to center, she had a message for the team.

“(Sofia) hits it hard, goes right to a person, runs into the dugout and she goes, ‘Guys, we can hit her. We can do this,’” said Derrick. “Even though she didn’t get on, she hit the ball hard and spread the confidence among us.”

That early contact and confidence turned into a constant

stream of runs as the Warriors scored in each of the following innings.

Derrick’s double started the second inning as she was pushed around the bases by hits from Hope Ward and Natalie Draeger to give the team an early lead that they would never relinquish.

While the Warriors were confident that they were going to win, they let everybody else know in the third inning as the team’s offense exploded for six runs. It started with Alcantar getting

walked, which was followed by

a double from Riley Black. Five Warriors recorded hits in the inning to go with three batters being walked and two errors from Kennedy.

“We said, ‘Hey, look at that, we can hit this girl all day long and we can hit her hard.’ So they had that confidence and they went out and made some great hits,” said Rice. “All the way through, one to nine. Everybody was hitting the ball well.”

North Douglas finished with 14 hits in the game as a team. Draeger finished with four hits, three

RBIs and scored two runs; Black had three hits and scored two runs; Derrick had two hits and scored three runs while Alcantar had two hits and scored two runs. Cydni Dill scored three runs and had three RBIs. Vaughn scored two runs.

“No one wanted to give up. No one got down on anyone,” said Draeger, who was named player of the game. “I think the team was just really powerful today. Just had a really good hitting day.”

The scoring didn’t stop there as North Douglas scored a pair of

runs in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh innings.

“We were never satisfied,” said Derrick. “You could just feel the energy in the dugout, we wanted more. Our goal was to 10-run them in whatever inning that we could. Not just because we wanted to go home but because we just wanted to compete. We wanted to be the best but we wanted to be the greatest. That was just the energy across the whole dugout and that spread to everybody. Everybody was up and we wanted it.”

SEMIS *from B1*

Left: Second baseman Riley Black scoops up a grounder against the Honkers. Right: Derrick fires in a pitch as she recorded a no-hitter on the game. PHOTOS BY BECKY GERRARD

walked three batters. But while she dominated from the pitching circle, she also came up with the only runs of the game. After teammate Riley Black got on base in the first inning, Derrick hit a homerun to give the team the lead.

While the Honkers never truly threatened the Warriors, the trip to the state semifinals was not something that anyone saw coming. Lakeview finished fourth in its league and won nine of their last 10 regular season games to earn the last spot in the playoffs.

“When they walked out on the field, they were relaxed. They had nothing to lose. They had already gone further than anyone thought they would. And they walked out there saying, we’re just going to play our game,” said Rice. “Which is a great way – if you can do that, that’s great because that takes a lot of the pressure off. If you’re just out there saying, hey, we’re going to play our best game and see what happens.”

For North Douglas, the trip to the state championship is the second time

in the last three years. Returning from that 2017 championship winning team includes Derrick, who was the starting pitcher that season as a freshman, Black, Joanna Alcantar, Sofia Alcantar, Natalie Draeger and Hope Ward.

“I’ve got some experience and good leadership. Still young. Only two of my girls on seniors but you know, so I’ll still be starting three freshman. But, fortunately we’ve got some experience out there to kind of help calm them down,” said Rice. “But, I mean, walking into Jane Sanders Stadium is just going to be intimidating for all of them. So hopefully my girls that have been there before will be able to calm them down and keep them focused.”

It is the fourth time North Douglas has been to the state championship in school history. The Warriors placed second in both 2001 and 2003.

In the championship, the Warriors will face a familiar foe in Kennedy (22-4). This is the sixth straight playoffs in which the two sides have played each other.

QUARTERS *from B1*

helps everyone relax,” said Rice.

With the team relaxed, North Douglas pitcher Nicki Derrick did what she does best: rise up to the moment. Derrick allowed just four hits in the game and struck out 16 batters against a team full of talent.

“Talking to other coaches and getting ready for this team, one of the things they said was they hit the ball well. And one through

nine, they said they don’t have a weak spot in their lineup,” said Rice. “And boy, I tell you, Nicki was doing so well that you could see the batters of Grant Union getting frustrated because they just couldn’t catch up to that ball.”

After the early North Douglas run, the teams traded chances but were unable to convert. Twice Grant Union had runners on third — and twice the

Warriors got out of the jam. Then it was time for the visiting team to get back on the scoreboard.

In the sixth inning, the Warriors got another run across the plate before capitalizing on some Grant Union errors to score three in the seventh to extend the lead to five. The team finished with nine hits, including two from Joanna Alcantar, Riley Black and Cydni Dill.

“We definitely made them make mistakes. They had a few errors, a few overthrows, because they could see their season ending and they were panicked,” said Rice. “Don’t get me wrong, they’re a really, really good team. But they were trying to force that play when nothing was there.”

With the win, North Douglas not only moved on in the playoffs, but the team — thanks to some upsets

across the bracket — will host a home playoff game in the state semifinals against No. 20 seed Lakeview.

“We thought we were going to stay the Road Warriors for awhile. And then Lakeview pulled off that big upset. They were ranked number 20, every game they played last week were upsets,” said Rice.

After a slow start to the season, the Honkers won 12 of their last 13 games

of the season to secure the last spot in the state playoff. After three rounds of upsets, the team that finished fourth in its league is now one of four teams left in the whole state.

“I tell you, they’ve got me a little nervous. Now they’ve got to travel up and play us but apparently they travel really well,” said Rice. “We definitely can’t overlook them, we have to be ready for them.”

FINALS *from B1*

took both quarterfinal appearances (2016 and 2018) while the Warriors took the lone semifinal game (2017).

In that same span of years, both teams won their first — and only — softball state titles with North Douglas winning in 2017 and Kennedy winning last season.

“We’ve been at their place, they’ve been at ours, [head coach] Jesse [Rice] has been great and we’ve battled back and forth and whoever is the victor it’s like, OK, you guys got us this time or the other way around,” said Kennedy head coach Walt Simmons. “[Friday’s game] will be a lot of fun.”

Just as the team has done all season, Kennedy has been dominant in the playoffs. After 10-running Oakland — a team the Warriors split the season series with and scored two runs on all year — in the first round, the Trojans rolled to a 13-1 quarterfinal victory over Glide and a 7-1 semifinal win against Toledo.

“They’re a disciplined team. You can’t make a mistake against Kennedy. They are always really polished when they show up to play. So you just have to make things hap-

pen,” said Rice.

The eighth ranked, but seventh seeded, Trojans are a perfect 22-0 against 1A/2A opponents this season. The team’s only losses came against 3A teams — Scio, Dayton and Clatskaine — that are all ranked in the top seven in the classification. Clatskaine and Dayton are playing in the 3A state championship game on Friday in the game before the North Douglas-Kennedy matchup.

“They made us better. Very solid teams and that’s what I told [my team], we may not win this game but we’re going to get better from the experience,” Simmons said of playing the top teams. “That’s been something that I’ve harped on when we do the non-league games.”

For the Warriors, a league playoff loss pushed the fifth-ranked team to the ninth seed which meant a pair of road games. After a first-round bye, North Douglas defeated Bonanza 12-7 on the road and followed up that performance with a 5-0 victory over top-ranked Grant Union in the quarterfinals. On Tuesday against Lakeview, North Douglas punched its ticket to Eugene with a 2-0 win.

Now the sides meet again in a game that is quite different from last year’s contest. A season ago the Warriors were without junior pitcher Nicki Derrick who was out with an ACL injury. In her freshman state-winning season, Derrick helped push North Douglas past Kennedy with a 3-2 win.

“She’s an outstanding athlete. Just looking at the few stats that I can see that are out there, I mean, she’s a solid pitcher, she obviously can hit the ball,” said Simmons. “We obviously respect what she can do and hopefully we can come prepared and see if we can put the ball in play.”

While the venue of this year’s final may be new, both teams enter the game with state championship experience. The Warriors have six players that were on the team in 2017 while the Trojans, on their roster that features no seniors, bring back eight players from last year’s side. Kennedy’s state-winning pitcher Tressa Riedman graduated from last year’s team.

“We’ve matched up pitching wise, offense, defense and so I guess I look at Friday as another opportunity for either team to show what they’ve got,” said Simmons.