

Herald Sports



Tigers hunting for title

I went home for Easter this weekend and had a good time with my family making jokes about each other. Most of them ended up being about me. As my dad says, “Ça va.”

But while I was there, I told as many people who would listen about this small-school baseball team that’s been hot as Indian curry. I mentioned their run differential. I told them about the first game of the season and its dominating nature. I told them I haven’t seen a baseball team this good in awhile.

I kept telling them about the Stanfield Tigers and their unbelievable start to the season.

Let’s take a look at some team stats first. The easiest number to find is its run differential, which is posted over at

OSAA.org. In six games, the Tigers have allowed 10 runs and scored — wait for it — 91. Ninety-one! They are yet to score fewer than 10 runs in a game and have scored 20 or more twice. They’re hitting .462 as a team with a team-wide on-base-plus-slugging of 1.195. Their on-base percentage is .545. Their slugging

percentage is .651. I don’t even know what to do with these numbers. I can’t quantify them. All I can do is gape and say, “That’s pretty good, right?”

Let’s take a look at some individual numbers now through six games. You might want to sit down.

Thyler Monkus, a rarity in that he catches and leads off, is batting .667. Let that sink in for a second. He’s 14-for-21 at the plate. He’s got an OBP of .750, a slugging of 1.143, giving him an unreal and unfair OPS of 1.893. He’s got two triples already. He’s got three doubles and a homer. He’s scored 17 runs already. Alone, he’s scored more runs than two teams in the Eastern Oregon League.

Dylan Grogan is right up there with the junior catcher. Grogan’s slash line: .611/.652/.889. Again, what do you even do with these? Celebrate them, obviously, but the only word I can come up to describe them is gaudy, and gaudy has some connotations that would suggest superficial. There’s nothing superficial about those numbers. They’re the real deal.

But it’s not just the Grogan and Monkus show offensively. Four other guys — Tony Flores, Brody Woods, Makiah Blankenship and Ryan Bailey — are hitting .500 or better through six games. Each has an OBP of .500 or better. Jason Fitzpatrick is hitting .438 with an OBP of over .500. All five have OPSs over 1.000.

It’s clear that Stanfield is a good offensive team. But they can play defense, too.

Grogan started the 2016 season with a perfect game over Union. He’s tossed 10.0 innings so far, allowed five runs (four earned) on nine hits while striking out 21 and walking just four. His ERA, at 2.80, seems massive compared to his teammates’. Keith Wampler is the only other Tiger pitcher to allow an earned run, and he only gave up one in 4.0 IP, giving him a 1.75 ERA. Flores has 9.0 IP without allowing an earned run. Woods has tossed 7.0 IP of clean ball, and Bailey and Adrian Renner have hurled clean innings, as well.

But here’s the thing about this Stanfield team that impressed me most. It isn’t the talent and skill. It’s the attitude. After Grogan tossed his perfecto, I tried to get him to talk about it a little. Maybe I’d get a good quote about feeling good and wanting to do it. I don’t even know if Grogan had known what happened until I mentioned it. He was just concerned with the team winning.

“The most important thing is Stanfield won,” he said.

That’s huge. This Stanfield team had expectations of winning a title last year, and was ousted in the second round of the state playoffs. This team is intent on changing that outcome and winning the Tigers’ first 3A state title and first since winning the 2A/1A division in 2011.

These numbers won’t stay as crazy as they are now. That’s nearly impossible. But they do indicate the level this Stanfield team is currently playing at — a really high level; a state title-winning level.

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Stanfield stays hot against Riverside

Fourteen-run fourth inning propels Tigers to blowout

By **ERIC SINGER**
Staff Writer

For the sixth time this season, the Stanfield Tigers reached the double-digit runs mark in a game.

Stanfield obliterated league foe Riverside 22-1 in a Columbia Basin match-up last Wednesday afternoon, continuing the team’s incredible tear to start the season.

Junior Tony Flores got the start on the mound for the Tigers and he shut out the Pirates over four innings, allowing no hits and just two walks to go with seven strikeouts. Adrian Renner came on in relief to pitch the fifth inning, where he allowed just one run (un-

earned) and one walk to finish off a combined no-hitter.

On offense, the Tigers’ bats started off slow against Pirates starter Wayne Killion, managing four hits and three runs through the first three innings. But in the fourth inning, it went off the rails for Riverside, as Stanfield batted through the lineup twice to put up 14 runs to grab a stranglehold on the game.

Stanfield netted those runs as 15 men reached base — nine hits, four walks, and two hit-by-pitches — including a stretch of nine of the last 10 in the inning.

Ryan Bailey, Tony Flores, and Jason Fitzpatrick each had a team-high three hits in the game, while Bailey led with five RBIs. Thyler Monkus and Keith Wampler each scored four times.

It was the second time this season that Stanfield eclipsed

the 20-run plateau, as well as the fourth time that the game finished early due to the 10-run differential.

The Tigers have now scored 91 runs in their six games this season — an average of 15.2 per game — which is the most in all of the OSAA by more than 30 runs. In the same span, the team has allowed just 10 runs — or 1.7 per game — as the pitching staff has thrown a perfect game and a combined no-hitter in the young season.

So what is the teams’ secret to the surge?

“We’ve just been putting together good games all the way around,” Stanfield coach Bryan Johnson said. “We’ve emphasized good at-bats up and down the order and throwing strikes on the mound ... we haven’t played perfect baseball, but they’ve played pretty well so far.”

Stanfield has been propelled

by its wealth of experience as well, as the team returned all but one player from the 2015 roster that finished with 20 wins and a trip to the state quarterfinals.

On the mound, Dylan Grogan and Tony Flores have been solid at the front end of the pitching staff, combining for five runs allowed, 12 hits, 40 strikeouts and seven walks over 19 innings so far.

And in the batters box, Stanfield has combined for a .462 team batting average as the lineup has established itself with tough at-bats every time up.

Johnson said with this type of roster he knew a good start was possible, but he did not expect to see this type of outburst.

“I didn’t expect us to win by these wide margins, that’s for sure,” he said. “But these kids

See **TIGERS, A12**

Echo uses big innings to down Colton

Mackenzie Gonzales strikes out 10 in dominant performance

By **SAM BARBEE**
Staff Writer

On a chilly Thursday afternoon with a biting wind coming in from right field, two innings separated the Echo Cougars and Colton Vikings in a 3A interconference matchup in Echo.

The Cougars scored eight runs in the bottom of the second, buoyed by three Vikings errors, and plated six runs in the fourth en route to a 14-1 mercy-rule shellacking.

“We hit the ball hard today,” Echo (2-1) coach Bryan Bailey said. “We had some hard-hit balls. We executed bunts. We executed hit-and-runs. We executed stolen bases. Overall, they played well today. I was pleased.”

Mackenzie Gonzales tossed an abbreviated complete game, tossing five innings, allowing just one earned run on two hits while striking out 10 and walking just two. Bailey wanted the junior hurler to work on starting at-bats ahead with first-pitch strikes, instead of starting behind and going deep into counts, elevating the pitch count.

“There’s no doubt that (Gonzales) brings a high standard when she steps in that circle,” Bailey said. “That was our big goal today. I said, ‘Let’s not walk any lead-off hitters and then work from there.’ And she did a great job. She threw strikes. She was consistent. Her defense backed her up.”

Thursday, Gonzales was masterful getting ahead of hitters. Of the 19 at-bats Gonzales pitched, 14 of them started with a first-pitch strike. In fact, the worst initial count Gonzales ever faced was 2-0 in the top of the second, an at-bat she ended with a soft pop-up into her own glove. Gonzales’ third-inning walk came after a first-pitch strike then four balls, and her fifth-inning walk started with a ball before going full.

Gonzales finished with a strike rate of about 65 percent (91 pitches, 59 strikes).

“I trust my defense,” Gonzales said. “They’re great. They work hard. They put themselves in front of every ball, no matter what.”

The junior was also effective with her change-up, allowing just one hit on the brutal thing, a first-inning loop off the bat of Cassandra Neff, plating Shelby Marshall for Colton’s (0-3) first an only run.

“Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn’t,” catcher Erika Parks said of the



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Echo junior Mackenzie Gonzales delivers a pitch early during the Cougars’ 14-0 rout of Colton on Thursday in Echo.



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Echo senior Cheyenne Hilliard swings at a pitch during the first inning of Echo’s 14-1 win over Colton on Thursday in Echo.

bloop single. “She also struck out three hitters with it, too.”

Offensively, Echo played complete. Nine different Cougars scored runs. Nine

different Cougars had hits. Seven different Cougars had RBI. Parks had two RBI and a double, Cynthia Curiel had two RBI and a double, Alex

Pollick had two RBIs and a double, and Cheyenne Hilliard, Jamie Christopher, Mo-

See **ECHO, A12**