

Storm Softball Continues Winning Ways

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It was a "Tale of Two Teams" for the Watauga Storm 14U girls fastpitch softball team this past Saturday.

The Storm, playing in an AAU "Top Gun" tournament in Concord, again played to a 4th place finish among 22 teams in the 14 year old division. Playing in 90 degree heat, the Storm raced out to an early 2-0 record, defeating the Carolina Hit-N-Run (Hickory) by a score of 4-0 and then, immediately thereafter, corralling the Carolina Stampede (Rowan County), 4-3.

Pitcher Megan Jackson got the win in game one by tossing a four-hit shutout. fKristen Gill picked up her first complete game win of the year by holding the Stampede to just two hits and thanks to a very strong defensive effort by her Storm teammates.

Coach Mike Steele, commenting on the first two wins, credited the Storm for their "elimination of mental and physical errors, along with their strong hitting." As a result of their 2-0 pool play finish, the Storm was rewarded with the No. 2 seed in the "A" division. Leading the Storm at the plate was centerfielder Hope LaPointe (3-3), rightfielder Makenzie Wallace and Jackson (2-3), and Gill (2-2).

However, as strong and complete as the Storm played in pool play, their play in the bracket was not as productive. They were eliminated from the tournament in their next game, going down in defeat to the Carolina Power, from Wilkes County.

This game was not an easy one for either team as it took two extra innings to produce a winner.

The Power prevailed by a score of 8-7 but both teams had plenty of chances to win the game early. The Storm stranded 12 runners on the base paths and had the bases loaded twice. After a seemingly disastrous defensive effort in the 6th inning, the Storm put together a five-run rally in the seventh inning. Some timely hitting with two outs from shortstop Sierra LaPlante, LaPointe, and Wallace created a very dramatic rally that fell one run short of extending the game into another inning.

Coach Richard Butler, looking back on the game, said, "I love this group of girls. Many teams would have folded in this heat, in this situation. However, they didn't give up. For their effort, they should have their heads up, not down."

For the tournament, the Storm 14U was led by the hitting of LaPointe (.667), LaPlante (.571), Jackson and Gill (.500), and Wallace (.429).

After the tournament, Head Coach Jay Jackson summed up the day as a "turning point." "In pool play, we did the things necessary to deserve our seeding. We avoided errors, hit well, and got strong pitching from Kristen and Megan. It was a strong, team effort.

"In the bracket game, we beat ourselves. You can't leave 12 runners on base and commit many errors and wild pitches. Rarely, if ever, can you win games like that. However, the comeback in the last game was something to see. We can build on that. We don't like losing but realize we did more to defeat ourselves than the opposition did to win. I'm proud of the accomplishments from today and ready to build on our needs. I agree with Coach Butler...they

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are a special group of girls!”