

Champions Again.....

Written by Staff Reports

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After a sluggish start on Saturday, the Watauga Storm girls 14U Softball team erupted for 31 hits and 19 runs over two games to win the Top Gun "Winter Nationals NIT" in Huntersville. As champions, the Storm finished the tournament with a record of 4-1.

"I thought we would never come out of the hitting slump we've experienced over the last four tournaments," said Watauga coach Jay Jackson. "It's like we've become a Jekyll-Hyde type of team. The first part of our season, we won one tournament and placed in three others. After a three week, summer break we've been in a deep slump. Our defense has played well and our pitchers have all matured, but we haven't been able to support our efforts with timely hitting. We've lost too many games...and won too many by one run. Until Sunday, we've left an incredible number of runners on base."

In this tournament, the Storm was led at the plate by shortstop Sierra LaPlante who scorched the opposition's pitchers, going 10 for 15 (.667) in five games. She went 6 for 7 on Sunday, alone. Supporting LaPlante was pitcher/utility infielder Emily Visnic who went 9 for 15 (.600), along with third baseman Rachel Cox (.600/6/10). .. Other strong performances were turned in by third baseman second baseman Amie Sigmann (.500, 6/12), center fielder Hope LaPointe (.462, 6/13), and Megan Jackson (.417, 5/12).

The ladies from Watauga and Wilkes counties opened the tournament with a win over the Terminators from Charlotte by a score of 4 to 3. Pitcher Megan Jackson was credited with the win. Game number two was a bizarre affair with the Storm racing out to a 5-1 lead, against the Thunderbolts of Hickory, before allowing 4 hits and 2 walks to lose by a score of 6-5. In this game, catcher Rumburg was knocked out of Saturday's games, and most of Sunday's, as a result of a collision with a base runner. Later in that game, two Thunderbolt players collided with each other and the game was delayed for several minutes though both players continued in the lineup.

"This was a turning point for the girls," Jackson said. "Katie is a leader on this team. She's got enough energy, drive, and determination for 10 girls and her loss was pivotal. The girls could have easily folded but this was not the case. We had to resort to using Megan (Jackson) behind the plate. She hasn't caught since she was 9 or 10 but caught the last of game two and all of games three and four. It was new to her but she held her own. We hope Katie's knee isn't too banged up or an injury that is long lasting. We need her on the field, for lots of reasons."

Game Three, the first of bracket play, brought the Terminators back as the opposition. The Storm won by a score of 8 to 5. In this game, there were twelve Storm hits...more than the first two games of the day combined. Visnic pitched a complete game and took the victory. Emily was a member of the Wilkes County Little League team who recently advanced to the Little League World Series finals in Portland, Oregon.

Going the distance, Visnic was able to limit the Terminators to five hits. At the plate, the Storm was led by LaPointe, LaPlante, and Cox (all going 2 for 3). But Sunday, things were vastly

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different. To defeat the Harrisburg Hurricanes, the Storm pounded out 12 hits (6 singles, 5 doubles, and 1 triple) and the final score was 9 to 0. Pitcher Maykayla Pennington recorded the complete game win. In the

Championship game, the Terminators, once again, came from the loser's bracket only to face the duo of Visnic and Jackson (coming out from behind the plate) on the mound and to chase down 19 hits in 30 at-bats. Jackson, while credited with a save, struck out 6 of the last 8 batters she faced before the "mercy rule" ended the game.

"I'm incredibly impressed in the way we hit the ball on Sunday," said associate head coach Mike Steele. "The number of hits was incredible but even the balls that were caught were solid shots by the girls. I've been very frustrated with our inability to hit lately but I think the girls saw, by sticking to the fundamentals, how productive they can be. It's always a good thing when every player can get a hit in a ballgame. I think we've turned a corner on hitting."