

PITCHING, DEFENSE KEYS AT STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Written by Rick Strunk
Thursday, 30 May 2013 06:53

As usual, pitching and defense should be featured as the top fast-pitch softball teams in the state prepare for the North Carolina High School Athletic Association state championships this weekend. But there are also a number of players with spectacular offensive statistics in the eight-team field.

For the second year in a row, the Eastern and Western champions in each classification will face off in a best of three championship series at the Walnut Creek Softball Complex. All four of the championships are scheduled for Friday and Saturday. For many years the top four teams advanced to a double-elimination event.

This will mark the 19th annual fast pitch championships and the 39th year for NCHSAA softball. The Raleigh Sports Consortium and the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau are among the host city sponsors.

Here is a look at each of the four championships:

Class 4-A: Alexander Central (31-1), one of the state's top softball programs, takes on Wake Forest-Rolesville (20-3) for the championship, with the first game an 8 p.m. start Friday night in a battle of two Cougar teams. Alexander Central makes its 11th trip all-time to the state finals and third trip to Walnut Creek in the last five seasons.

Alexander Central has been dominant lately, outscoring its opposition 57-12 in the playoffs, and Kiana Millsaps (22-0, 0.93 ERA) is Alexander's top pitcher. Brooke Sharpe is an offensive threat, batting .444 and leading the team in home runs (five) and RBI (31).

Wake Forest-Rolesville will counter with pitcher Brittaney Dahle (13-1, 0.52 ERA, 160 strikeouts). Katy Holt leads WF-R at the plate with a .533 average.

Class 3-A: Greenville D.H. Conley (22-5), the only school with a team in both the baseball and softball state championships, takes on Concord Jay Robinson (28-2) with a 7 p.m. start on Friday night.

Conley, which won the state championship in 2011 and finished second in '07, has a pair of .400 hitters in outfielder Danielle Nadeau (.414) and first baseman Julia Allsbrook (.404).

Sophomore Rachel Weidner gets the bulk of the work in the circle (0.99 ERA, 162 strikeouts in 116.1 innings) and is also hitting .345.

Robinson, which won its first 15 games of the season, has one of the top pitchers in the finals in Keleigh Romine (21-2, 1.03 ERA, 225 strikeouts in 150.2 innings). Romine also leads the team in home runs with five and RBI with 39. Junior outfielder Tori Zavodny is hitting a red-hot .465.

Class 2-A: South Granville (24-1) and West Stanly (26-4) both have excellent traditions in softball. Interestingly enough, this series will be a rematch of the finals back in 1996 and '98, when South Granville beat West Stanly for the championship. First pitch of game one is scheduled for Friday at 7 p.m.

South has a potent offensive team, with 29 home runs led by Jenna Davis, the Player of the Year in the Carolina 12 Conference (.560, five home runs, 47 RBI). Kasey Newcombe was the Pitcher of the Year in the conference.

The Colts of West Stanly have a conference Player of the Year of their own in Macey Webb, who won the honor in the Rocky River Conference and has signed with South Carolina. Webb is batting a phenomenal .704 with seven home runs and 31 runs batted in, and her on-base percentage is almost unfathomable at .825.

Class 1-A: Robersonville South Creek (23-4) and West Wilkes (27-4) will start their championship series on Friday at 8 p.m.

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West Wilkes makes its first appearance in the NCHSAA softball championships and knocked off previously unbeaten Chatham Central in the regionals. The Blackhawks are led by Mountain Valley Conference Player of the Year Courtney Lackey, who is 16-2 on the mound with a 1.80 ERA and is also batting .360. Freshman outfielder Caitlyn Shepherd is batting .483 and senior outfielder Lauren Church .476 for West Wilkes.

South Creek has two very capable pitchers in senior Taylor Lynn Moore (10-2, 0.71 ERA) and junior Lauren Sitterson (9-2, 1.86 ERA). Sitterson, one of five switch-hitters listed on the South Creek roster, is batting a team-leading .395.

CLASS 4-A: WAKE FOREST-ROLESVILLE (20-3) vs. ALEXANDER CENTRAL (31-1), Field 2

Friday, May 31: Game 1, 8 p.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 2, 11 a.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 3, if necessary, 2 p.m.

CLASS 3-A: GREENVILLE D.H. CONLEY (22-5) vs. CONCORD JAY ROBINSON (28-2), Field 1

Friday, May 31: Game 1, 7 p.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 2, 11 a.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 3, if necessary, 2 p.m.

CLASS 2-A: SOUTH GRANVILLE (24-1) vs. WEST STANLY (26-4), Field 4

Friday, May 31: Game 1, 7 p.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 2, 11 a.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 3, if necessary, 2 p.m.

CLASS 1-A: ROBERSONVILLE SOUTH CREEK (23-4) vs. WEST WILKES (27-4), Field 3

Friday, May 31: Game 1, 8 p.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 2, 11 a.m.

Saturday, June 1: Game 3, if necessary, 2 p.m.