

Sports

A.L. downs T.J. in regional opener

Lynx set for rematch with Lewis Central

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Abraham Lincoln's postseason journey got off to a roaring start Saturday at City Park.

Thanks in large part to the offensive production of the middle of its lineup, A. L. earned a 12-2 victory over Thomas Jefferson Saturday in the Class 4-A regional opener.

The Lynx's Nos. 3-5 hitters, Chelsea Acosta, Kristin Burhenne and Lauren Rommel, finished the game a combined 6 for 14, with 10 RBIs, five runs and two home runs.

Most important, the Lynx earned a date with Lewis Central Monday night at 7 at L.C. in the regional semifinals. A.L. pulled off a huge upset of the Titans last summer in the same game, and if similar fate occurs tomorrow, the Lynx will put themselves just one win from the state tournament for the second consecutive year.

L.C. earned a 1-0 victory over the Lynx in eight innings when the teams last met June 4.

A.L. enters the game once again as an underdog, but with plenty of positive momentum.

"The bats were huge tonight, and that was great getting that early momentum," A.L. coach Pat Kroll said. "And that only helped our pitching as well."

Michaela Kennedy earned the win with five strikeouts, but it was the Lynx's offense that stole the show.

A.L. carried a 2-0 lead into the fifth inning, and that's when the middle of the order started to take control. Morgan Hively and Burhenne each reached base with one out before Rommel delivered a three-run homer over the left-center-field fence to increase the advantage to five.

It was Acosta's turn in the sixth when she connected on a two-run double that hit off the left-field fence for a 7-1 advantage. After Hively scored during the next at-bat on a wild pitch, Burhenne followed with an RBI single for an eight-run lead.

Acosta delivered the final blow an inning later when she hit a three-run homer, essentially ending the game.

While the Lynx's offensive dominance paved the way for victory Saturday, it may be their poise that helps them Monday. Last year's postseason victory over Lewis Central gave them a new perspective on how good they can be.

"We learned that we can beat anyone we want to if we play good defense," said Acosta, who finished with five RBIs and three extra-base hits. "Anything can happen. That game really helped us out and made our confidence better."

Despite seeing its season end Saturday, Thomas Jefferson has reason to be proud. The Jackets finished with a 10-19 record a year after going just 1-25.

The future looks very bright. Allison Sillik and Kelsey Byers are the only seniors on the roster, and four varsity players are freshmen or younger.

"We just played as a team," T.J. coach Shannon Stusse said. "There were times when we didn't, and we have to fix that; that comes with growing pains."



Staff photo/Cindy Christensen - Abraham Lincoln infielders meet before the bottom of the third inning of A.L.'s 12-2 win in a Class 4-A regional opener over Thomas Jefferson.

"We are young. Next year, we'll have four seniors, which is (big) for us. But they have some big shoes to fill."

Stusse also recognized Sillik and Byers' importance to the program.

"They're great," Stusse said. "It was always, 'Ok, Coach. If that's what the team needs,' with them, which is what leaders do."

Abraham Lincoln (15-19) 200 034 3 - 12 14 0

Thomas Jefferson (10-19) 000 010 1 - 2 5 2

W: Michaela Kennedy. L: Mikayla Dunn.

2B: AL, Chelsea Acosta 2, Taylor Powers. TJ, Carly Williamson. 3B: TJ, Taylor Thomas. HR AL, Acosta, Lauren Rommel.

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