



## Only tourney losses go to eventual district champions

***By Jan Schultz***

***The Imperial Republican***

A bit of history was made by the Lady Longhorn softball team last week at the C6 district tournament.

It was only the second time in the history of the softball program at CCS that the team came home with some district hardware.

Finishing with a 3-2 tournament record, they returned with the district runner-up plaque. The only other time that happened was in 2005.

The Lady Longhorns racked up wins last Thursday and Friday against Southern Valley/Alma, Chadron and Blue Hill. They had to come from behind in all three to win.

Their two losses in the double elimination tournament were to the eventual champions from Gothenburg, who also hosted the C6 tournament at their home fields.

Gothenburg's district championship sent them to the state tournament that started Wednesday in Hastings.

Head Coach Denise Smith couldn't be happier for the team.

Especially for the six seniors, she said, who have stayed with the program despite a lot of losses over the previous three years.

Four seniors—Cassie Burpo, Ally Vrbas, Abbi Vetter and Blair Hartman—have played all four years in high school, including their freshman and sophomore seasons when there were no wins.

Anna Bauerle and Jodi Koellner both joined the program as sophomores, also going through a winless sophomore year and just three wins last year.

"For these girls to get to this point and have the success they have, I'm happy," Smith said.

"I won't forget how they developed (as players) so much," she added.

It's a bit bittersweet for the head coach, too. This is the first group she's worked with for four consecutive years, she said.

She anticipated some success this year compared to the past three seasons, she noted, because of the experienced senior class and a good group of freshman who joined the team this year.

While the 2013 team tied the record for best district finish, they had also hoped for a record for most wins in a season, which stands at 15.

This year's team finished with a 12-15 record, but had seven varsity games cancelled due to weather.

Smith felt the school's win record could have been surpassed if all those seven games had

been played.

A record that did fall this season was for homeruns. Koellner hit two at districts, finishing the season with five. Her performance this year broke both season and career records for homers. Here's a recap of Chase County's tournament games.



### **CCS vs. So. Valley/Alma**

It looked a bit dismal for Chase County early in their opening game against Southern Valley/Alma, as they trailed 6-0 after two at-bats by their opponents.

The Lady Longhorns put two across in their half of the second, still trailing 6-2, before holding So. Valley to a runless third.

That's when Chase County's offense kicked in. They scored 19 runs in the bottom of the third, capped by a walk-off grand slam by Koellner.

Koellner's four-run homer gave Chase County the 15-run margin they needed to end the game after three with a 21-6 score.

The Lady Longhorns had 12 hits in the game, led by Koellner's homer and two singles.

Other hits were recorded by Destiny Reinke, a double and single; Anna Bauerle and Claire Kuenne, two singles; doubles from Abbi Vetter and Katelyn Wheeler; and a single from Josie Peterson.

Bauerle pitched the three inning game, striking out three, walking one and giving up nine hits.

### **CCS vs. Chadron**

Again, Chase County fell behind early, 2-0, against Chadron in their second game of the day last Thursday.

Chase County moved ahead in the fourth, 9-8, after tallying three hits and two walks.

Chadron tied it 9-9 in the fifth, but that would be the last score for the Lady Cardinals.

After a scoreless fifth, Chase County's sixth inning was highlighted by a two-run homer from Koellner, which put Chase County back in front, 11-9. The Lady Longhorns scored five more in the seventh, then held Chadron from scoring in their seventh, to win 16-9.

Chadron's pitcher was called for several illegal pitches in the game, causing her some trouble getting the ball across. She walked eight Chase County batters.

The Lady Longhorns had another productive game offensively with 11 hits.

Koellner homered and singled to lead the team. Also getting hits were Peterson, two doubles; Abbi Vetter and Destiny Reinke, two singles each; and singles from Vrbas, Wheeler and Becca Huicochea.

Bauerle pitched all seven innings, striking out two, walking one and giving up nine hits.

The Chadron win assured Chase County a trip back to the tournament on Friday.

### **CCS vs. Gothenburg**

Chase County was sent into the loser's bracket after a 14-3 four-inning loss to Gothenburg in their third game of the day Thursday afternoon.

The Lady Longhorns were outmatched at the plate, 12 hits to four, but did hold Gothenburg to a three-up-three-down inning in the third.

Earning Chase County's four hits in the game, all singles, were Vrbas, Koellner, Peterson and Wheeler.

Bauerle went the distance on the mound, striking out two, walking one and giving up 12 hits.



### **CCS vs. Blue Hill**

Blue Hill eliminated Chadron in the tournament's opening game Friday, so met Chase County in the next game to determine who got into the finals against Gothenburg.

It was another come-from-behind win for Chase County, but this time, they did it in the seventh inning during very windy conditions.

After four innings, Chase County trailed 8-7. Blue Hill scored another run in the sixth to go up 9-7, then Chase County failed to score in the fifth and sixth innings.

Still behind 9-7 in the top of the seventh, Reinke led off and was hit by a pitch, then Kuenne, Burpo, Bauerle and Vrbas all singled, scoring two to tie the game 9-9.

In an attempt to take the lead, Smith sent Burpo home on Bauerle's single, but she was thrown out at the plate.

Koellner then came to bat with bases loaded and an out. Her hit to left field was missed, and it scored two runs, giving Chase County an 11-9 lead. Peterson's single then scored Koellner to take a 12-9 lead before the inning ended.

After Blue Hill's lead-off batter grounded out, they recorded a single.

With one runner on board, Peterson made a great catch in right field, and the next batter walked, putting two on the base pads with two outs.

The next batter popped up in the infield, but the wind was taking the ball out of bounds. Anna Bauerle snagged it, though, just a foot from Chase County's dugout.

"That was a huge emotional win," Coach Smith said, as it assured they would be taking home some district hardware.

Bauerle led the offense with a double and two singles. Also hitting were Kuenne, a double and single; Vrbas and Koellner, two singles each; Vetter, a double; and singles from Peterson and Wheeler.

Bauerle pitched the seven-inning game, striking out two, walking three and giving up 14 hits.

### **Gothenburg second game**

Chase County would have had to beat Gothenburg twice Friday to capture the district title, but lost the first one 10-0 after four.

The Lady Swedes connected for two homers in the game, which scored six runs, and held Chase County to three hits, a pair of singles from Vetter and a single from Burpo.

Bauerle again handled the pitching for the Lady Longhorns, walking two, striking out none and giving up nine hits.

### **Gothenburg No. 8 seed**

Gothenburg, 19-7, enters the Class C state tournament as the No. 8 seed among eight teams and met top-seeded Wahoo, 25-6, Wednesday morning.

The double-elimination tournament ends Friday with a 2 p.m. CT championship game at the Smith Softball Complex in Hastings.