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The Numbers Lie in NCS Softball

Campo's softball team turns No. 7 seed into First Place

By Michael Sakoda



In the championship game, Shelly Suhling struck out two batters in the extra inning to seal the win.
Photo Andy Scheck

Shelly Suhling, with an 0-2 count, hit a home run over the right field fence, winning the game 3-2.

Campo moved on to face Terra Linda in the NCS Division III Championship on June 1.

It was a battle of pitchers. Terra Linda's freshman-phenom Ashley Bottomley struck out five and gave up only three hits in the first five innings. Through six innings, Cougars pitcher Suhling was working on a shutout-86 pitches with 32 strikes, two strikeouts, two walks, only four hits and 0 earned runs.

The score remained 0-0 until the top of the fifth when the Cougars went on a run. Sophomore first baseman Charlotte McNeil drew a walk to lead off the inning. McNeil advanced to second on a wild pitch, but after two more outs, she remained there. The next batter, senior captain and short stop Becca Crisp was hit by a pitch, which brought up freshman third baseman Zoe Marrott. With the count 2-2 Marrott blasted a triple to left field, scoring two runs. Marrott was brought home by a 1-0 double by junior catcher Kristin Ghamghami.

Campolindo led 3-0 going into the bottom of the fifth.

Campo stranded two in the top of the 7th, and Suhling faltered in the bottom. She hit the lead-off batter with the first pitch, but she seemed to regain her composure, notching her third strikeout on her 91st pitch.

But Terra Linda wasn't done. The Cougars allowed a second runner on base, which brought up Cheyenne Cooper who hit a 3-run homer over the left field fence, tying the game and forcing extra innings.

Senior Tela Zembsch led-off the eighth for Campo, hitting a 2-2 single. Sophomore Danielle Thomas hit a 1-0 double to left field with one out, bringing senior captain Sarah Reynolds came to the plate. With the count 0-2, Reynolds hit an RBI double, scoring Zembsch.

The game rested on Campo's defense. The game rested on Suhling's arm.

"Shelly pitched a great game until the seventh inning where she hit the lead-off batter and then made an error throwing for an out at second base," said an amused McLaughlin after the game. "When we scored that run, I walked up to her and said, 'You just got a second chance,' and she goes, 'I know. Don't worry, I'm on it.'"

Suhling retired the side, adding two more strikeouts to her total, and winning the title for the Cougars.

"This is as good as it gets," McLaughlin said after the game. "These girls believed in themselves, and they didn't give up. They believed, and that's all that really matters."

Two Lamorinda schools were featured in the Division III NCS Softball tournament: Acalanes and Campolindo.

Acalanes finished their season with a record of 17-5, clinching a DFAL Title, and earning the No. 5 seed in the tournament. After a first round bye, the Dons upset No. 4 Sonoma Valley 4-2, before falling to the eventual runner-up, No. 1 Terra Linda, 10-3.

After a shaky 4-7 start, and a midseason coaching change, the Cougars stormed to an 11-9 record (8-4 in DFAL play), closing their regular season winning 7-of-8 games, and earning the No. 7 seed in the NCS Tournament.

"At that time, the girls just didn't believe how good they were. They were making little mistakes to lose games... so we just started going over the basics...and they started playing better," said Campolindo's wrestling coach, Bob McLaughlin, who took over as head coach of the team when his predecessor resigned. "They started winning games."

The Cougars carried their momentum into the first round of the playoffs, where they destroyed Hercules 21-2. In the second round, Campo upset No. 2 San Marin 6-0.

In the third round, they were tested. The Cougars traveled to Eureka, where they went to extra innings against the No. 3 seed. In the top of the eighth, senior captain

the right field fence, winning the game 3-2.

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Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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