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Hoopa claims Class B crown

Brad Botkin

The Times-Standard

FERNDALE -- First they supplanted perennial champion Ferndale as the powerhouse of the Little 4, defeating the Wildcats in a one-game playoff to secure the coveted No. 1 seed in the Class B North Coast Section playoffs.

Now, for the first time since 1982, the Hoopa Warriors are the NCS class A softball champions. And fittingly, with their 4-1 victory over Urban on Saturday, head coach Ryan Ray and the Warriors earned their stripes on Ferndale's home field, hoisting their trophy as Wildcat coach Tom Jorgensen and many of his former players looked on.

"It feels really good, I'm so proud of the girls," said Hoopa head coach Ryan Ray.

Hoopa brought with it a convoy of enthusiastic fans, effectively achieving the home away from home-field advantage. Eager to put their stamp on the outcome, Warrior fans went three rows deep for the length of the left-field line.

And they were loud, very loud.

But ironically, amidst the energized and vocal crowd, it was the quiet, seemingly effortless mechanics and calm demeanor of starting pitcher Melia Jarnaghan that echoed clearer than anything.

She was great, said Ray. She just nonchalantly pitches so smooth.

Jarnaghan was in total command all day, striking out five in seven innings of work, while recording numerous outs in critical situations. But any pitcher will tell you they are only as good as their defense. And when it had to be, Hoopa's defense was sensational.

With the Warriors clinging to a 1-0 lead after a Carrie Ames sacrifice fly in the bottom of the third, Jarnaghan was facing a one-on, no-out situation with Urban's most dangerous threat, Liz Robertson, at the plate. Robertson connected for what looked to be a sure gapper, until center fielder Kayla Carpenter came out of nowhere to make a tremendous running catch.

Later in the inning, after Urban had tied the game, first and second

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basemen Angie Anzora and Jessica Ammon each made run-saving plays to end a situation that had the potential to be much worse.

And shortstop Karmen McCovey negated a leadoff walk with a dazzling snag on a line drive up the middle, which she proceeded to turn into a double play at first.

With Jarnaghan on her game and the defense more than doing its part, you knew it was a matter of time before the explosive Warrior bats woke up.

The alarm clock went off in the bottom of the sixth.

Ammon sent a bleeder into short left field that was mishandled by Hilary Lewis, allowing Carpenter to score all the way from first base, knocking the ball loose from catcher Ashley Smith, who made a valiant attempt at a diving tag. Fawn Bussell followed with a single that got under the outfielder's glove and rolled to the wall, plating Ammon and leaving Bussell on third.

Bussell walked home on an Ames single.

"We were getting girls on and just not getting them in," said Ray. "But it finally came together."

The bottom of the lineup, Ammon, Bussell, Ames and Anzora were a combined 7-for-11 and accounted for all four RBIs. When you're getting that kind of production from the six hitter down, and your defense is making circus plays, and your pitcher is named Melia Jarnaghan -- you're in pretty good shape.

It was the type of effort that personifies championship team; they did it together.

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