

Pitcher Gorniak comes in relief, stops Knights as Tigers explode for late runs

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE — The Tigers rallied from early deficits to take the first game of a girls softball double-header 6-5 Friday over Breese Mater Dei at the Edwardsville Sports Complex.

The doubleheader was originally scheduled for Saturday, but was moved ahead, due to predicted rain storms in the area.

The Tigers came back from being down 4-1 to score four runs in the pivotal fourth inning, and got a great pitching performance from Meghan Gorniak, who gave up only one run in four innings of work in relief of starter Jordan Garella.

“They hit the ball. They hit the ball hard,” said Tiger coach Lori Blade. “Meghan did a great job coming in and getting us some ground balls. And that was really important. But the kids did a great job battling back to get a little bit of runs here and there, and to keep it going and then pulling out the win. Really a great job by the kids.”

Edwardsville also did a great job of putting the ball in play, forcing the Knights into making errors that proved to be costly.

“The kids did a really good job of putting the ball in play,” Blade said, “and that’s important. We’re trying to realize the importance of that, because we’ve got to give ourselves a chance, and we did in that first game, by putting it in play. And we came up with some timely hits when they did have some misfortune. Just a good job bouncing back, again.

“But we’ve gotta figure out how to start a little bit quicker offensively, and shut kids down early,” Blade continued. “That’s multiple games now that we haven’t done that, and it’s something we have to focus on. And it’s as much mental as it is physical.”

The Knights were able to jump out in front in the opening inning. A.J. Halleman line the first pitch down the left field line for a double, then scored on Logan Braundmeyer’s single to center. One out later, Kelsey Gerdes singled off the pitcher’s glove to drive in Braundmeyer, taking second on an error. Abby Braundmeier struck out and Hayley Palm grounded to first to end the inning.

The Tigers were able to pull a run back in the second, starting when Sarah Hangsleben reached on an error by the left fielder, then went to third on a hustling play on Maria Smith’s sacrifice bunt. Hangsleben scored on a ground out by Taryn Brown.

Mater Dei extended their lead to 4-1 in the top of the fourth, starting with a Braundmeyer double to the center field fence, scoring on a Palm single. Ali Beckmann singled to put runners on the corners, and Rylee Johnson singled up the middle to score Palm and advance Beckmann to second. That was when Gorniak came in to pitch, and she promptly slammed the door on the Knights, getting Kalleen Engelhardt to fly to center, Halleman to fly to right, where Brooke Webber made a great diving catch, and Braundmeyer to line back to the box to end the threat.

The momentum changed around in the Tigers' favor, and in the bottom of the inning, Edwardsville scored four times to take the lead on 5-4. Anna Burke started things off with a triple, scoring on a Hangsleben ground out. After Smith struck out, Brown singled and stole second, going to third when Webber reached on an error by the shortstop. Brown and Webber executed a double steal perfectly, Brown scoring. Raven Frank singled home Webber, then stole second, advanced to third on a wild pitch, and scored on a throwing error by the catcher to give the Tigers their first lead, one they would never relinquish.

Gorniak shut down the Knights in the final three innings allowing only three hits while walking one. She got some assistance in the sixth when Hangsleben made a great catch against the fence in dead center field to stop a home run bid by Halleman.

Smith gave the Tigers some assurance in the sixth with a one-out solo homer over the right-center field fence, but the Knights came back in the seventh on a leadoff solo shot by Braundmeyer. Mater Dei would get no closer as Gorniak only gave up a single to Abby Halleman to get the win for Edwardsville at 6-5.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)