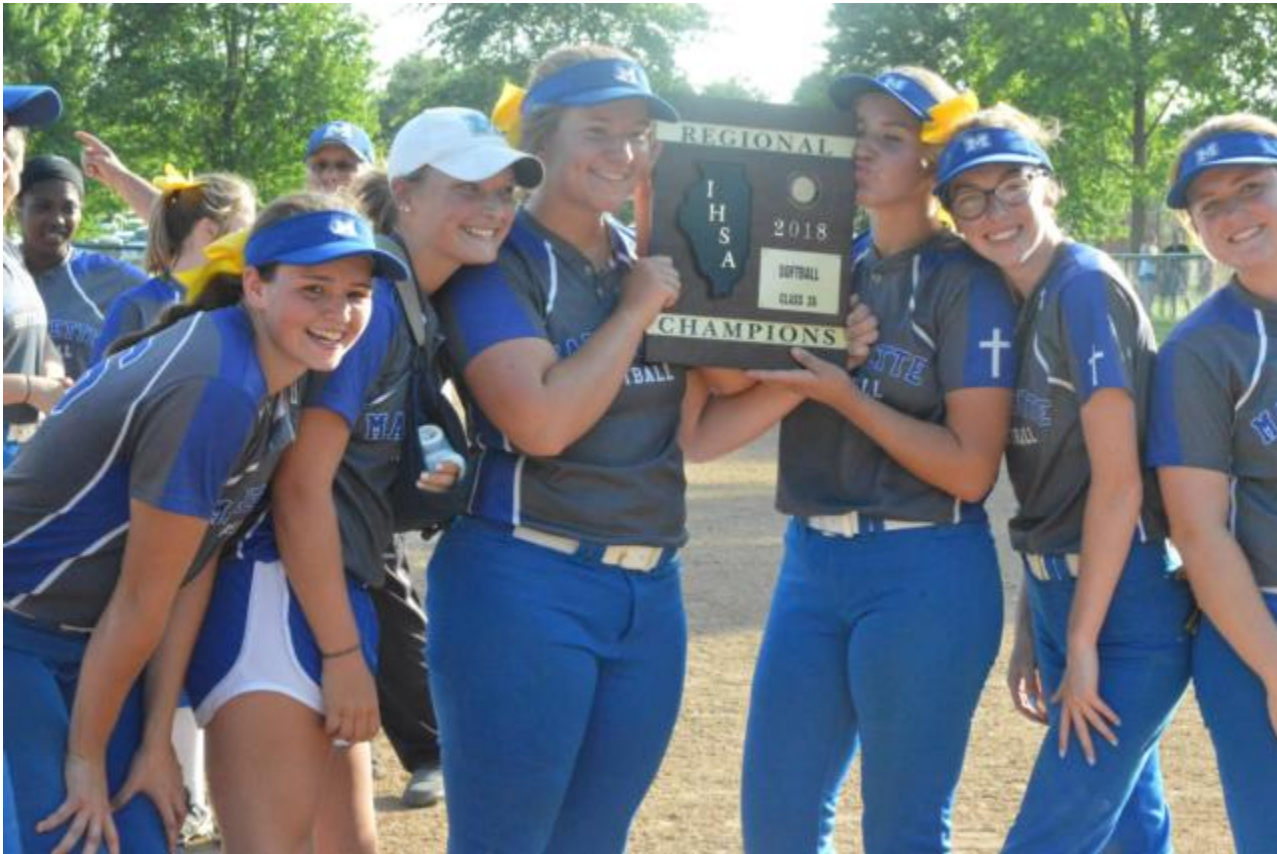


Three-run shot from Morris gives Marquette 2A regional title over Southwestern 3-2

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Marquette Catholic had their backs to the wall Tuesday afternoon.

The Explorers were behind 2-0 in the rain-delayed final of their IHSA Class 2A regional at Gordon Moore Park in the bottom of the sixth and the top of their order coming up against Piasa Southwestern's Bailee Nixon, who had pretty much shut Marquette down most of the day.

Jada Johnson then opened the inning with a single and went to third when Kiley Kirchner, attempting to sacrifice, reached base when the throw to get her was dropped, bringing up Gracie Morris.

Morris then got ahold of a Nixon offering and sent it over the fence in left field for a three-run homer that gave Marquette a 3-2 win over the Piasa Birds and sent them to the Gillespie Sectional; MCHS will take on Buffalo Tri-City at 4:30 p.m. Thursday in a sectional semifinal game, with the winner meeting Wednesday's Williamsville-Gillespie winner at 11 a.m. Saturday for the sectional title and trip to the Athens Super-Sectional at 11 a.m. Memorial Day against the Gibson City Sectional winner.

Marquette moved into the sectional at 35-1 on the season, while Southwestern was eliminated at 21-7.

“I don't even know what to say,” said Explorer coach Dan Wiedman. “We thought all year long we had to hit to win; we gave up a couple of runs on a couple of mistakes – it just seemed like we kept popping the ball up all game long and the one inning, we had the top of the order coming up for the third time and we were hoping they would get things started.

“Jada got things started for us then Gracie with the huge hit; we were just lucky to get out of this game with a win. Southwestern played fantastic, our kids kept fighting and everything, but it was a great ball game.”

When the top of the order was due up in the bottom of the sixth and things went Marquette's way, Wiedman knew something big had to happen at that point. “I told one of the assistant coaches who was coaching third base, 'we need Jada to get on base right

now'," Wiedman said. "She had struck out twice and is a fantastic leadoff hitter; still, once she got on base, we got the bunt down and had first and third, we still needed that huge hit – Gracie's been doing that for us all year long. That was probably the biggest hit of the year for us."

Southwestern coach Peg Mitchell was philosophic after the game. "A loss is a loss," Mitchell said. "You hate then anytime, you don't like to give up a lead; you win as a team and lose as a team – no single player won that, no single player lost that. My assistant coach and I were just talking; they were one swing better than we were."

"We've had games this year that were tight and tense; for them, this was just 'here we go again – let's ride that ride one more time'. Tip your hats to Marquette – that one girl (Morris), she sent out a pretty tough pitch and like I said, today, they were one swing better than we were."

Marquette pitcher Meghan Schorman opened the game by striking out nine of the first 10 batters she faced, giving up only a walk to Megan Bailey before the top of the fourth came up. The inning started with a single from Bri Roloff, followed by a Molly Novack double that sent Roloff to third; Roloff, attempting to score, was thrown out at the plate when Schorman took a relay throw and fired to Johnson, who put the tag on Roloff for the out.

That brought Haley Edwards to the plate, who struck out, but Johnson dropped the ball; Johnson's throw trying to get Edwards at first went away and scored Novack to put Southwestern ahead and allowed Edwards to get to second. Edwards then went to third on a balk and came home on a wild pitch from Schorman to put the Birds up 2-0 going into the bottom of the fourth.

Nixon kept the Explorers at bay until the sixth-inning rally that put them ahead; Southwestern threatened to score in the seventh when Sydney Baumgartner walked and Bailey singled to put runners at first and second before Schorman dismissed Josie Bouillon and Natalie Keith by strikeout to send Marquette to Gillespie.

Morris was 1-for-3 on the day for Marquette with the game-winning homer, three RBIs and a run scored; Kyra Green was 1-for-3 with a double, Kirchner was 1-for-2 with a double and run scored, Johnson 1-for-3 with a run scored, Schorman 1-for-3 and Abigail Porter 1-for-3. For Southwestern, Novack was 1-for-3 with a double and run scored, Roloff was 1-for-3 and Bailey 1-for-2; Edwards had a run scored.

Schorman went the distance for the win, striking out 15 and conceding two runs (one earned) on three hits; Nixon took the loss, also going the distance with four strikeouts and conceding three runs (two earned) on six hits.



