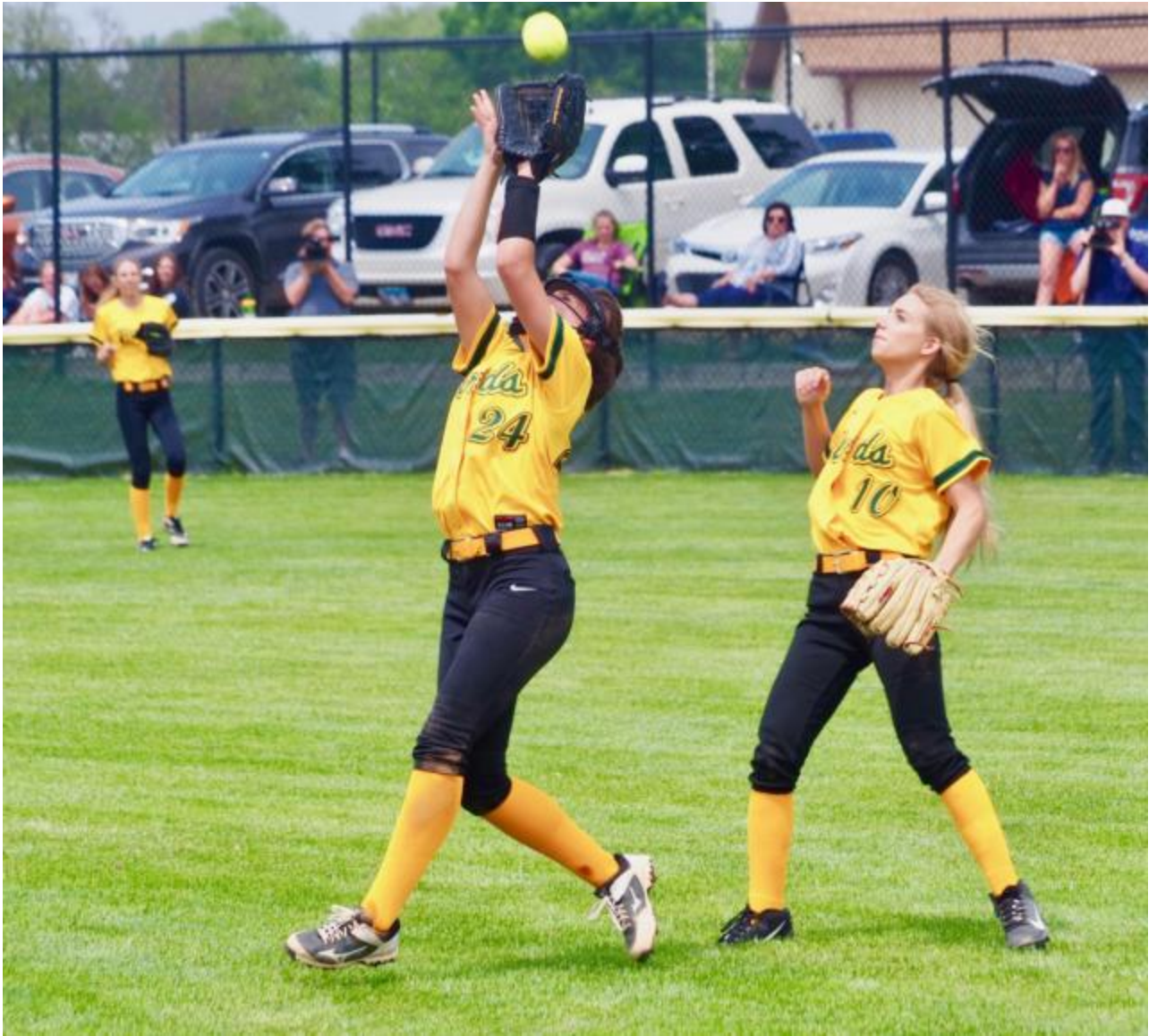
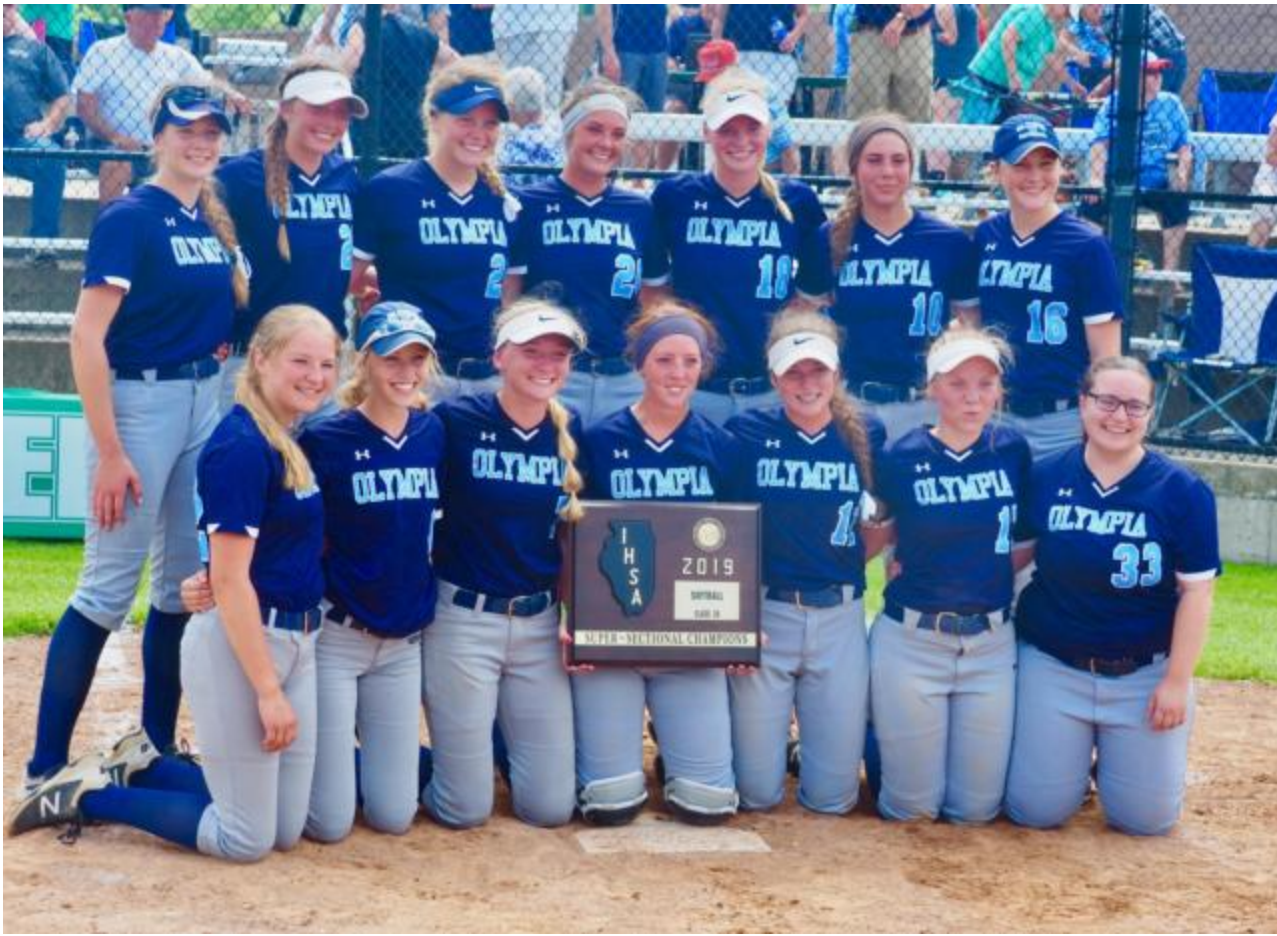


Untimely hitting dooms Birds in super sectional loss to Olympia

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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SPRINGFIELD - Virtually all season long the Piasa Southwestern Birds did enough to take advantage of their opportunities; however, against the Olympia Spartans, it was a different story.

Thirteen runners got on base for the Birds, but Kaelyn Leverson and the Spartans stepped up time and time again as they limited Southwestern's lineup and did enough offensively to win 4-1 in the Class 2A Athens Super-Sectional and punch their ticket to the state semifinals.

“Our main focus all year long with runners in scoring position we don’t have anxiety about it. We know our pitcher’s going to pitch her best and we have confidence in those situations that we’ll get out of it,” Olympia head coach Courtney Hoffman said. “It means a lot. We have a lot of alumni that come back and are so involved in the program. Our girls always see that, and we’re always preaching that tradition. We just want to keep that Olympia tradition alive.”

With the game tied at 1-1 in the bottom of the fifth inning, the Spartans loaded the bases via an error, a walk, and a single for Alexis Finchum with no outs. Olympia took the lead for good on a past ball that scored Mariah Maris from third base. Moments later, Finchum hit a sacrifice fly that brought home, Chloe Scroggins.

The next batter, Kate Finchum, popped out to Sydney Baumgartner behind first base, but with her back facing home plate, Lizzy Davis took off from third base. The speedy shortstop dove headfirst into home plate and was safe making it 4-1.

“It was a gamble, but Lizzy is one of our best runners, and we knew the catcher's left-handed, so it's a tough tag,” Lizzy had a great slide and got a fingertip under the plate. It was one of those that she could've been out, but we needed that run.”

Davis finished 3-for-3 at the plate with two singles and a double while Sydnee Usherwood went 2-for-3.

Southwestern, who previously lost to Olympia in the 2003 (2-0) and 2009 (9-1) state championships, finished the season at 23-3.

“We out-hit them, but they had some big timely hits there in the bottom of the fifth. That was huge,” Southwestern head coach Tammy Norris said. “You had two great teams going at it. Give Olympia credit. They made some timely hits, and that was the difference in that ball game.”

Bailee Nixon pitched all seven innings for the Birds surrendering four runs (one earned) and six hits while striking out three batters and walking two. Sophomores, Bri Roloff and Megan Bailey, finished 2-for-4 at the plate and Hannah Nixon, a freshman, went 2-for-2 with two singles.

The Birds had a significant opportunity to put up a crooked number in the top of the second inning after two errors put Josie Bouillon and Nixon on base, which was followed by a single by Baumgartner. Mayci Wilderman roped an RBI single to left field, but a runner was thrown out between second and third base ending the inning.

In the bottom half of the inning, Usherwood doubled to left field, and Leverson singled her home tying the game at 1-1.

Leverson pitched a complete game and struck out two batters while walking one and giving up ten hits and no earned runs.

Olympia will face Pinckneyville in the Class 2A state semifinals at the EastSide Centre in East Peoria this Friday at 5:30 p.m.













