

# CM Battles Back, But Highland Walks It Off To Win Softball Regional Crown

by Nathan Tucker  
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BETHALTO - Friday was Regional Championship day at the Bethalto Sports Complex, where a strong Highland team faced off with a Civic Memorial team that's much better than their 14-win record would indicate. Both teams combined to score six runs in the final inning, and Highland walked off with a 12-9 win.

CM hosted the regional, but Highland played as the home team, being the number one seed.

The Eagles jumped out to a first-inning lead with Bella Thien and Avari Combes crossing the plate, but the Bulldogs answered right back, plating two runs of their own in the bottom half.

A string of Bulldog hits, a hit batter, and a two-run homer from Maggie Grohmann saw Highland take a 6-2 in the second inning, and they played with a lead for the majority of the ballgame.

Highland added two more on a Alex Schultz two-RBI single in the third, and up 8-2, seemed to be coasting towards regional glory. Credit to Civic Memorial, they battled, and weren't going to go away easy.

"I tip my hat to CM," said Highland head coach Glenn Nicholls postgame. "I thought they came out and played a really good ballgame. That's a team that competes, and they're going in the right direction."

CM pushed two across the plate in the fourth, Ella Landers started the inning with a double, Lauren Hardy got on board with a single, and both were brought home later in the inning. At 8-4, the Eagles were in a position to claw themselves back into the game.

On a day where one might have expected Highland ace Sophia Donoho to contain the CM offense, the Eagles stayed pesky, and only had one 1-2-3 inning all evening. Highland head coach Glenn Nicholls admitted his starter didn't have her best stuff, even so, Donoho struck out 10 Eagles on the night.

"(Donoho) wants the ball. She's been putting zeros on the board, she's been getting ahead, working around the zone, and hasn't been walking people," Nicholls said postgame.

"Earlier in the season she would walk four or five batters, and I told her that's like four or five singles, and we've got to get those numbers down. And she really has lately, if you look at her numbers later in the season, there's maybe a walk here or there, but she's been great in getting ahead and putting hitters away."

CM scratched across two runs in the sixth to make it a 9-6 game headed to the seventh and final inning at Bethalto Sports Complex. All nine Eagles came to the plate in the seventh, as they scored three runs to tie the ballgame at nine.

"This is a scrappy team, they stay together," said Lucas Angelo of his Eagles ballclub. "Sixth and seventh inning they said 'we're going to make them bat in the bottom of the seventh', and that's exactly what they did."

A string of singles, an infield error, and two walks gave the hometown Eagles life late. Lauren Hardy and Bella Thien both scored for the third time in the evening, highlighting their ability to get on base and give their team a chance with runs.

Speaking postgame, CM head coach Lucas Angelo knew that his team could have scored even more.

“I think we left the bases loaded twice,” Angelo said. “It’s something we’ll work on for next year, a mental note for us, that we know we have to work on. These girls are hard workers.”

Unable to push across those runs that could have given CM the lead, Highland came to the plate in the bottom of the seventh needing just one run to win, but ultimately scored three.

Leadoff hitter Alex Schultz was the first baserunner of the seventh for the Bulldogs, reaching on a single. Abby Schultz popped up to second, which brought Maggie Grohmann to the plate with two outs.

Not wanting to risk giving up another long shot to Grohmann like his team did in the second, Lucas Angelo made the call from the dugout to intentionally walk the Bulldog number three hitter. That brought Maddie Trauernicht to the plate.

“He got to pick his poison there,” said Highland’s Glenn Nicholls on the decision to walk Grohmann to face Trauernicht in the seventh. “(Trauernicht) really squared the ball up the whole game. I guess he played the percentages, trying to get a force out.”

Maddie Trauernicht worked the count full, finally got a pitch to hit, and hit it she did. She sent a towering drive over the left field fence, and won the 3A Regional with one swing of the bat.

Trauernicht was mobbed by her Bulldog teammates at home plate. The walk-off dinger was Maddie Trauernicht’s fifth home run of the season, but none more important than the swing that sent her Highland team to the sectionals.

“We’ve kinda ‘been there done that’,” said Nicholls. “Especially the leaders on the team, these seniors, they’ve won regionals the last few years. That’s quite a feather in their cap.”