

Softballers Look For Run Support

Going into the 2002 season, Mulvane High School softball coach Charlie Mason called improving hitting the No. 1 priority.

After the first games of the season, Coach Mason was still calling hitting the No. 1 priority. The Wildcat girls had their troubles at the plate Thursday, March 28, when they started the season at home against Valley Center.

The Hornet pitching held Mulvane to only three hits in two games to sweep the two-game Chisholm Trail League series in Mulvane, 6-0 and 2-0. In fact, the Cats were no-hit in the second game.

"Hitting was a problem," admitted Mason, "but starting the season against Valley Center didn't help either. They are awfully good and their pitchers are good. You can't simulate in practice a lot of the things they do, especially that first pitcher, (Joanne) Fluker. She changes speeds an awful lot and that got us a lot of the time."

The Wildcats actually could have changed the whole complexion of that opener in the very first quarter. They loaded the bases on Fluker with no outs and the meat of the Cat order coming to the plate.

"When we didn't score then, it kind of took the wind right out of our sails," said Mason. "We had everything set up for a big inning and it didn't happen." Mulvane's clean-up hitter grounded into a force out at home and the next two batters followed by striking out to end the threat harmlessly.

"The girls were tentative at the plate and not aggressive, that hurt us a bunch," said Mason. "That inning could have been big. We would have been on the board first and it would have lifted their confidence up, but we didn't get it done."

Mason had hoped to rebound from last season when the Cats had a poor season at the plate as he has seven or eight starters returning. Clutch hitting was a big factor as was hitting up and down the line-up.

"We only hit the ball hard a couple of times all night," added Mason. "And when we did hit it, it was right at somebody. (Dani) Phillips lined one down the first base line that would have been a double or triple but their first baseman made a great play. And when we couldn't hit the ball, it effected us in the field. We made three or four errors in the first game which allowed them to score four unearned runs. And we had

FIRST GAME

Valley Center	013 002 0—6 7
Mulvane	000 000 0—0 3
Joanne Fluker and Betsy Moody; Sara Simpson and Sara Clasen.	

SECOND GAME

Valley Center	000 002 0—2 8
Mulvane	000 000 0—0 0
Lindsey Davis and Lisa Torrey; Shayna Duncan and Sara Clasen.	

three errors in the second game that led to an unearned run."

That undercut the Wildcat pitching talents of veteran starter Sara Simpson, a senior, and sophomore Shayna Duncan.

"Our pitching held up pretty good," said Mason. "They hit Simpson pretty hard but didn't get a lot of hits. Pitching wasn't a problem. Our defensive lapses and our hitting was. When you give somebody more than three outs, especially somebody as good as Valley Center, they're going to get to you. They have one of the top teams in the league and in the area. We look them into the middle innings without an earned run in the first game and into the 6th inning in the second game without a score, so you've got to feel pretty good about that. It's just too bad we couldn't have broken out in that first inning.

"Hitting is a matter of confidence and doing the right things," added Mason. "We just have to keep swinging the bat. There is still a long way to go this season."

The Cats tried mightily for a breakthrough in inning No. 1. Stephanie Tatum walked and Melissa Doerfer and Phillips singled to fill the bases, but Kayla Linnebur, Sara Clasen and Katie Rose went down in order.

The only other Mulvane hits in the opener came with Linnebur's double in the 4th and a single by Clasen in the 6th.

Simpson pitched the distance and gave up only seven hits and struck out six. She also issued one walk.

Duncan scattered eight hits and didn't walk a batter in the nightcap but didn't get any hitting support as the VC hurler faced only two more than the minimum in seven innings. Mulvane's Ashley McKenzie was hit by a pitch in the 2nd inning and Sara McKnight reached on an error in the 5th.

The Wildcats will be taking on another CTL power today (April 4) when they travel to Goddard. Games start at 4:30 p.m.