

Crusaders attempt to defend NAIA sectional crown

By G.J. EMMAN
Crusaders Staff Writer

The snow hasn't even stopped falling, and it's playoff time already.

I'm not talking Red Wings hockey here. I mean college softball - in particular Madonna University, which opens the defense of its NAIA Sectional Tournament title this afternoon.

The Crusaders, 29-12 through Tuesday, will host the College of Mount St. Joseph's (from Cincinnati) in a best-of-three series, starting today with the first game at 2 p.m. at Massey Field in Plymouth.

The two teams haven't met this season - Mount St. Joseph's had a 17-6 record through Monday - but last year, Madonna eliminated St. Joseph's in the Sectional final.

The Lady Crusaders are in the proper form for a tournament run. Since a 2-0 loss to North-

SOFTBALL

wood University April 13, they have won 10 of 12 games.

An obvious reason for the success is the emergence of the Madonna offense. Four times in the last eight games, the Crusaders have surpassed 11 runs scored in a game. They had managed that just three times in the previous 30 games.

Also, coach Jerry Abraham has shown no reluctance to rotate his four pitchers. Shanna Strong continues to be the staff ace; she has a 12-7 record with 18 starts, 121 1/3 innings pitched and 53 strikeouts, all team highs. Her earned run average of 2.89 is second to Janell Leachinger, whose 7-1 with a 2.01 ERA.

The rest of the mound crew: Angie Van Doorn (4-4, 2.89 ERA) and Lynda Weichel (3-0, 3.18

ERA). All of them have at least 23 innings of work this season.

Last weekend, the Crusaders won three-of-four games, sweeping Heidelberg College Sunday 12-4 and 14-8 and splitting with Siena Heights Saturday, winning 1-0 and losing 5-4.

In Sunday's win over Heidelberg, Madonna collected 16 hits in the second game and 17 in the first. Jamie Heins led the attack in the second game, going 4-for-4 with a home run and five runs batted in.

Jeanie Baxter (from Redford St. Agatha) added three hits and three RBI. Jennifer Pinter had two hits and an RBI, Dawn Shaffer and Michello Birchmeier (Redford Thurston) each had two hits, and Stacey Piontkowski had a two-run double.

In the opener, everyone contributed. Pinter and Baxter each drove home three runs, Pinter going 3-for-3 and Baxter getting two hits. Melissa McGue and

Birchmeier contributed three hits apiece, McGue getting a pair of RBI and Birchmeier one, and Courtney Senger and Christy Riopelle had two hits each.

Leachinger was the winner in the second game, allowing four earned runs on six hits and a walk, striking out four. In the opener, it was Strong earning the win, surrendering six earned runs on 13 hits and four walks, with two strikeouts, in seven

innings.

Saturday's double-header with Siena Heights was highlighted by Strong's mound performance in the first game. Strong was close to perfect, giving up just one hit and one walk in posting the shutout.

Madonna got its only run of the game in the first inning, and Jamie Vickers did all the work in supplying it. Vickers slugged a solo home run, one of only five hits for the Crusaders. McGue

got two of them.

In the second game, the Saints overcame a 4-0 Madonna lead by scoring three runs in the fifth and two more in the sixth. Three Crusader errors aided the offense; Van Doorn was the losing pitcher, giving up nine hits and a walk, but just two earned runs, with five strikeouts in seven innings.

McGue had a hit and two RBI and Birchmeier chipped in with two hits.

Madonna splits pair of doubleheaders

It would have been appropriate for Madonna University's baseball team to celebrate the completion of its pair of doubleheaders with St. Francis (Ill.) with an ice cream sundae. Sny, a banana split.

The Crusaders divided the four games, winning the second of each doubleheader after the losing the first. They finished the weekend 2-4-19.

Mark Serra's fine relief work, 4 2/3 innings of two-hit ball that raised his record to 3-1, in the second game Sunday helped Madonna record a 10-6 victory.

Saturday's win went to Jason Dube, 2-1, who gave up a run in the only inning he worked but was the beneficiary when Madonna scored twice in the bottom of the eighth to take a 6-5

win.

Madonna scored eight in the first to grease the way to Sunday's win and Serra came on when starter Eric Butler was touched for three runs in the second and third innings.

Pete Quinn had a pair of singles and drove in two runs while Aaron Shrewsbury drove in two with a single plus a sacrifice fly. Dan Taylor went 3-for-3 with a double and an RBI.

Madonna was held to seven hits in the first game Sunday, a 4-1 loss that dropped starter Joel Hillebrand to 4-3.

Quinn had a pair of hits, one his 10th double of the season, while Shrewsbury accounted for the Crusaders' lone run with his eighth home run. Taylor and Deano Voletti also had two hits.

Starter Craig Benedict was removed in the sixth inning of the second game Saturday. Joe Fabris and Eric Crawford checked St. Francis until Dube's came in to start the eighth.

Left fielder Tim Knaulowski went 3-for-4 and needed just a single to hit for the cycle. His only RBI came on his second home run.

Catcher Voletti drove in three runs with a sacrifice fly plus a two-run home run. First baseman Jeff Gutt had a pair of hits and drove in a run.


Four errors contributed to Madonna's defeat in Saturday's opener. Starter Dan Pydyn, 4-2, was nursing a 2-1 lead into the seventh but couldn't get that final out as St. Francis erupted for five runs.

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