

League title eludes Marlins in loss to Wildcats

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This was supposed to be the year in which Farmington Hills Mercy finally ascended to the Catholic League throne in the sport of softball.

But the Marlins were deposed before the coronation could take place Monday by St. Thomas Villanova of Windsor in a 4-2 loss.

That's right! A team from Canada, where the most famous monarch in the world is the head of state, is the Archdiocese of Detroit champion.

Wildcats coach Kirk Hayes didn't address that irony but said, "We just have a lot of gratitude and appreciation that we're able to compete at this level in one faith with teams across the

■ SOFTBALL

border."

After being the runner-up to Harper Woods Regis the last two years, a veteran Mercy team (24-8) figured its time was now.

But three errors, some baserunning mistakes and Villanova's timely hitting helped to make the Wildcats the A-B Division winner.

"It means a lot to us, because we don't go on to district or regional tournaments," Hayes said. "This is the end of our season (with the exception of the Operation Friendship game)."

Hayes played musical chairs with his pitchers at Memorial Field in Eastpointe, making four

changes as he rotated between starter Erin Lambros and reliever Dianne St. Gorman.

Lambros, a smaller, slower left-hander, pitched the first three innings and was the winner; she made two return trips to the mound for an additional 1 1/2 innings.

St. Gorman, a taller, faster right-hander, worked the other 2 1/2 innings, but Hayes alternated pitchers more than usual due to a steady rain that fell during the middle innings.

"No team has seen the same pitcher all game long again," he said. "The plan is to change the speed of the ball, so we don't give teams time to get accustomed to seeing one pitcher. But this is the first time we've gone back

and forth so much."

"(St. Gorman) is the closer, and (Lambros) pitches better in the rain. As it drizzled on and on, it had to do with grip and how a pitcher holds the ball. (Lambros) throws a little weaker but holds the ball tighter."

The Villanova pitchers combined for nine strikeouts and nine walks. Mercy had just four hits — all of them from the top third of its order — Erin Carson (two), Dana Falvo and Carrie Villanueva.

Villanova had five hits off Mercy pitcher Megan Fediuk, who went the distance. She had two strikeouts and didn't issue a walk.

The Marlins scored first when Carson started the game with a single, advanced on Falvo's sacrifice and scored on a base hit by Brankiewicz.

But the Wildcats (19-3) took the lead in the second, 2-1. St. Gorman and Krista Dunn had back-to-back hits, and both scored on Kelly Bondy's two-out single.

The third-to-first throw wasn't in time to get St. Gorman, and Dunn beat the throw back to her place.

Mercy had the tying run thrown out at the plate in the third inning.

Villanova made it 3-1 in the fourth. A dropped ball in right field put Dunn aboard, and she scored on Bondy's groundout to shortstop.

St. Gorman hit a leadoff triple in the sixth and scored her second run on Amanda Densau's one-out double.

"I thought we were sloppy at times, and our baserunning was absolutely horrendous," Mercy coach Jack Falvo said.

"Our seniors were dedicated all along to playing in this game, and they're deeply disappointed to lose this game."

Despite its baserunning and fielding misgues, Mercy had chances in the late innings.

Brankiewicz and Nuvvera Naamli had the sixth with consecutive walks. Hayes brought back Lambros, who retired the next three Mercy batters.

"If Alex Duda (the third batter in that inning) drives the ball somewhere (she hit a flyout to deep center), we score two runs and we have a different game," Falvo said.

In the seventh, the Marlins loaded the bases with two outs on three walks off St. Gorman. At that point, Lambros made another relief appearance.

A routine grounder to second off the bat of Naamli was dropped at first base, allowing Marissa Lawrence to score Mercy's second run.

Lambros ended the threat and the game with a strikeout.

"Three runs is tough to overcome in one inning," Falvo said. "If we drive the ball with Carrie Brankiewicz on second base, she was coming around. She was either going to tie the game or be out at the plate."



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