

Cougars complete successful title defense and send seniors off in style:

	R:	H:	E:
Great Oak (26-4-2 Overall):	0-0-0-0-0-0-0=0	3	1
Norco (31-1 Overall):	0-0-0-1-0-1-X=2	3	2

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Irvine, CA (Deanna Manning Stadium)-

Friday evening's CIF-SS Division one softball championship matchup could've gone one of two ways: either a pitcher's duel between Ma'ta Faapito & Sarah Willis or a downright slugfest. What we got was the former. Freshman Abby Dayton led off the fourth inning with a single to left center field and was scored on Paige Smith's sacrifice fly giving Norco a 1-0 lead. With the amount of offensive firepower this Wolfpack lineup has Cougars coach Rick Robinson wanted one more run going into Great Oak's final at bat. Kyleigh Sand made up for a tough night at shortstop (two errors) with Norco's insurance run scoring Kinzie Hansen who reached on an error in the Cougars sixth. Willis had to escape sixth and seventh inning jams for the win.

Both pitchers combined to face just two batters over the minimum in their first three and a half innings of work with eight strikeouts, a hit batter, and single. In pitcher's duels more often than not it's the team that scores first who prevails. Dayton and Hansen led off Norco's fourth inning with consecutive singles which put runners at the corners with one out. Smith's sacrifice fly to right field scored Dayton who advanced to third on Hansen's single and gave Norco the early 1-0 lead. Sand reached on an infield single & Katelyn Olson by a fielder's choice but Olson was caught stealing to end the inning.

Smith remarked "Winning back to back championships is an indescribable feeling. However it's also bittersweet to know this will be the last time I'll put on this uniform and play with these girls. We were doubted a lot during the year but proved everyone wrong and got it done again. This game was more personal to me because Dave is my travel coach and I've known most of that team since I was nine years old. These were two completely different games (referring to last year's title win against Gahr), last year we jumped in front early and tonight we had to grind out each run."

Meanwhile the freshman Dayton said "After my first at bat I knew I had to make an adjustment and had a feeling that once someone broke thru for that first hit we were going to score. We just needed a spark to get us going and that hit was it. To start out my career here with a title and let our seniors leave with one is a great feeling. I was happy to be able to be there for that final game of the year and win it all. I'm excited for the next three years."

Great Oak had perhaps their best opportunity to score in the sixth inning. With one out Kayla Edwards singled up the middle and Faapito reached on an error (Sand's second of the day). Ramsey Suarez struck out on a call that was not very popular with the Great Oak fans and Candice Yuengling grounded out getting Norco out of trouble.

They again had an opportunity with two outs to tie the game as Sara Kinch singled and Serena Slavey walked but Quincee Lilio's strikeout ended it.

Norco coach Rick Robinson remarked via text message "I felt better after getting the second run but that's a great hitting team & wasn't comfortable until that final out was recorded. These seniors had quite the impressive run with three finals appearances and two titles along with a 118-11 overall record. I'm proud of them and can't wait to see what they do at the next level."

Wolfpack Notables:

LP: Ma'ta Faapito CG, 3 Hits, 2 Runs, 2 K's, 1 HBP, 2 BB's

Ramsey Suarez>>recorded Great Oak's first hit in the second inning against Willis

Cougar Notables:

WP: Sarah Willis CG, 3 Hits, 0 Runs, 8 K's, 2 BB's

Kyleigh Sand>>2-3 with an RBI

Paige Smith>>RBI sacrifice fly in the 4th to put Norco up 1-0 scoring Abby Dayton (single)