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WISCONSIN SPORTS PRESS RELEASE

BATS Academy Fastpitch 16U and 18U teams win 2015 ASA Class "A" State Championships

Watertown, WI — Mequon-based BATS Academy's 16-and-under and 18-and-under girls fastpitch softball teams both captured this year's American Softball Association (ASA) Class "A" Wisconsin State Titles — the former via a dominating 18-7 run-rule victory over the Salem-based Wisconsin Lighting and the latter via a gritty, extra-game, extra-innings comeback win over a tough Madison-based Badger Blitz squad.

Held last Thursday through Sunday at Brandt-Quirk Park, the event drew all of Wisconsin's top club teams.

"It was an outstanding weekend for our program," said BATS program leader and 16U head coach Kyle Knoblauch. "I am extremely proud of our players and coaches. It's great to see all of our hard work pay off. We knew if we played our brand of ball that we would have a great shot at winning the championship in both age divisions."

BATS 16-and-under

For the tournament as a whole, the BATS 16U team outscored its opponents 90-to-13 while cruising to an undefeated 7-0 record across both pool and bracket play. The keys to the BATS' success were relentless offensive production, consistent pitching and solid defense. Over the seven games, the team batted an unheard of .464 and plated an average of 12.9 runs per game. Burlington's Dani Koenen, a Davenport University commit, was the workhorse in the circle, logging 26 innings, 5-0 record, and 2.15 ERA with 18 strikeouts. Meanwhile, Wisconsin Lutheran's Katie Grunert threw seven scoreless innings and earned two wins of her own.

"Our goal was to jump on teams early, get them away from their style of play," said Knoblauch. "In all seven games, we scored early and often, and because of that we were never really tested in the late innings."

"We all had the same goal in mind this weekend," said Koenen. "Coach K really enforces if we pitch and play tough defense, then everything else will fall into place. I got my job done in the circle, and our defense was solid all weekend. I knew I could count on my team behind me, including my catcher Alyssa Horn, who caught every game with me."

The offensive star for BATS 16U was Burlington's Tallyn Lewis, an Iowa State commit, who batted .682 for the tournament with three doubles, four triples, 14 runs scored, 17 runs batted in and three stolen bases. Other top performers included Menomonee Falls' Stephanie Cole (.700 BA, 10 R, 8 RBI, 5 SB), Madison East's Jada White (.625 BA, 8 R, 4 SB), Watertown's Ellee Jensen (.591 BA, 17 R, 7 SB), Laconia's Payton Kastenschmidt (.429, 10 R, 11 RBI), Middleton's Rachel Everson (.381 BA, 10 R) and Wilmot's Sawyer Wightman (.350 BA, 12 RBI). Wilmot's Alyssa Horn was rock solid behind the dish, catching five of the seven games.

"I can't express how proud I am of this team," said Lewis. "We played as a team all weekend and played hard all weekend. It's a great feeling to go undefeated and be able to say we're the best in the state. I am very proud to be apart of a great team and a great program."

In the title game, the BATS defeated the Wisconsin Lightning 18-7. The game was broken wide-open in the top of the sixth when the BATS plated 8 runs on 9 hits. Koenen picked up the win, throwing a complete game with 5 strikeouts. Lead-off hitter, Jensen was a perfect 4-for-4 with a triple and three runs; Lewis was 3-for-4 with a double, triple and 4 RBI; Wightman was 3-for-4 with a double, 3 runs and 2 RBI; and Everson was 2-for-4 with a double and triple. Cole and Kastenschmidt contributed another two hits apiece. In total, the BATS had 19 hits.

Koenen summed it up best, "It's the best feeling in the world to know that all of our hard work in the offseason really paid off. It's great to play with girls that have the same passion and to accomplish this huge goal as a family."

The BATS 16U squad was on the heels of their 5th place finish (31 team field) at the ASA National Qualifier in Novi, MI. The team's overall record currently stands at 19-6. Next up, will be a trip to the PGF Firecracker National Showcase in Indianapolis, IN.

BATS 18-and-under

In the 18U tournament, the BATS squad outscored their opponents 44-to-12 while posting a 6-1 record across pool and bracket play. Key to the BATS' success was the strength of the team's pitching in the form of Brookfield Central standout Crystal Sicard and West De Pere ace and Murray State commit Amber Van Duyse. Sicard (3-1) sported a 1.17 ERA for the tournament with 22 strikeouts in 25.2 innings of work, while Van Duyse (3-0) mirrored those marks with a 1.03 ERA and 11 strikeouts across 19.1 innings.

"This weekend was so exciting," said Sicard. "It helps that Amber and I have opposite styles. Together we make the perfect duo. I always know that she's got my back if I'm having a rough inning and I have hers. I think the best thing is that it's never a competition between us, but mutual respect and understanding for each other as pitchers and teammates."

"I am incredibly proud of the effort that these young ladies put forth this weekend," said 18U Co-Head Coach JoAnna Rupp. "We faced some great competition and were able to succeed and execute on many levels. At no point did these girls give up. They played through some challenging moments and fought until the end. Every player had a role in this tournament, and that is how we were able to win. I cannot wait to see how far this team can go the rest of the summer."

Top offensive performers include Muskego's Annika Graves (.423 BA, 7 R, 5 RBI, 3 SB), Brookfield East's Emma Megal (.400 BA, 4 2Bs, 7 R, 7 RBI, 3 SB), Waukesha North's Alyssa Grimm (.400 BA, 5 RBI), Appleton North's Grace Garvey (.400 BA, 3 2Bs, 5 RBI), and Kaukauna's Haley Huss (.400, 6 R, 5 RBI).

"After coming up just short in the state tournament last year, our team was eager to come back and win it all this year," said Graves. "Going into the championship game, we knew we were facing a great Badger Blitz team with Nicole Newman leading the way. We didn't want it any other way, we wanted to go up against the best."

As a senior at Madison LaFollette, Newman earned Softball Player of the Year Honors from the Wisconsin Fastpitch Softball Coaches Association (WFSCA) and then went on to be named the Missouri Valley Conference "Freshman Player of the Year" while pitching for the D-I Drake University Bulldogs this past spring.

Against the Blitz, it took two games for the BATS to secure the state title. Coming up from the losers bracket the Blitz needed back-to-back victories over the BATS to win the championship. In the top of the seventh inning of the first game with 2 outs and 2 runners aboard, Newman serving as designated hitter broke open a 0-0 pitchers' duel with a 3-run "no doubt" blast over the fence in left center. The BATS rallied for 2 runs in the bottom of the seventh and had runners on second and third before surrendering the final out on a pop-out to short and losing 2-3.

The second and final title game was even more exciting with the BATS ultimately defeating the Blitz 7-6 in eight innings in dramatic fashion. Trailing 5-4 in the bottom of the seventh, after a 2-out infield single by Megal, Grimm ripped a double in the left field gap to score Megal from first. Game tied. The BATS ended up loading the bases but were unable to plate the winning run. Again trailing by one (6-5) in the bottom of the eighth with bases loaded and 2 outs and 2 strikes, Megal came

through in the clutch again, delivering a game-winning, walk-off 2-run single to left center scoring Oconomowoc's Brooke Little and Graves.

"It is an extreme understatement to say that Nicole is intimidating in the circle," Megal conceded. "With the count 0-2, I kept thinking 'Protect, protect, protect. See a strike. Hit a strike.' I fouled off two tough pitches and then got the good part of the bat on the next ball. It felt really good off the bat. When it dropped safely out of the left fielder's reach, the crowd went wild. My first reaction was relief; my second, pure joy. We did it. We all did it. The BATS are State Champions!"

The sparkplug of the BATS' offense, leadoff hitter Graves reflected what it took to win the state title: "We stayed disciplined at the plate and capitalized on our scoring opportunities. Our small ball and speed, followed by clutch hits, allowed us to put pressure on their defense. We fought hard. Every pitch counted. We deserved to win the championship, and it took all 13 players to get it done."

Graves added, "I couldn't be prouder to be a part of this 18U team and the BATS Academy program. We are the 2015 ASA 'Class A' State Champions. However, we are far from done."

The BATS 18U squad was on the heels of their 4th place finish (17 team field) at the ASA National Qualifier in Novi, MI. The team's overall record currently stands at 11-5. Next up, will be a trip to the PGF Firecracker National Showcase in Indianapolis, IN.

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