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The Hoopa Warriors softball team poses after winning its second consecutive NCS Class B title at home on Saturday. Sean Quincey/ The Eureka Reporter

A champion's spirit

by Sean Quincey, 5/27/2007

The Hoopa Warriors quite literally played with an angel on their team in the North Coast Section Class B championship in Hoopa on Saturday.

After watching Ferndale pitcher Mishka Bessingpas-Hamor spark a two-run seventh inning that tied the game at 3-3, Hoopa pitcher Chenone Blake headed to the plate in the bottom of the inning with a chance to settle the score.

With two Warriors on base and two outs, Hoopa coach Ryan Ray pulled aside her star pitcher before she began her at-bat.

"She told me Harmon Lewis was in my heart and she said I could do it," Blake said, referring to the former Hoopa girls' basketball coach who passed away a month ago from stomach cancer. "She told me this was for him."

As destiny would have it, Blake roped a high 2-2 pitch to left-center field to bring in Natalie Carpenter, giving Hoopa the 4-3 win and back-to-back NCS titles for the first time in the school's history.

After the game, the Warriors, all of whom drew "HL 30" on their arms in remembrance of Lewis, dedicated the season and the NCS win to him.

"It felt so good," Blake said of the hit. "I'm so happy."

Her emotions could just have easily been very different after the game.

Hoopa took what seemed to be a commanding 3-1 lead in the bottom of the sixth inning on a Fawn Bussel RBI single, but the Wildcats charged back in their next at-bat.

Ferndale's No. 9 hitter Brianne Miller reached on a single to center field and Bessingpas-Hamor brought her in with a

grounder through the middle of the infield. The Cats pitcher then came home to tie the game on a throwing error to first that could have sealed the deal.

It was Ferndale's inability to take advantage early in the game of opportunities, which were hard to come by for either team in this pitchers' duel.

Both pitchers threw complete games with Blake striking out five and allowing five hits. Bessingpas-Hamor fanned six and also allowed five hits.

"I think it took (the Wildcats) too long to score more," Ferndale first-year head coach Vanessa Porter said. "After the second inning we sat and waited. We should have come after them."

The Wildcats had three hits through six innings and left six runners on base. Their only score came when Jenna Miller hit a triple and later scored on a throwing error.

The Warriors' other runs again came in the bottom of the fourth after putting on their rally caps.

On Friday in the semifinals, they scored two runs in the fourth inning after the team put on the lucky charms en route to a 4-3 win over visiting Tomales. On Saturday, they again wore gloves on their heads and scored two runs during their at-bat in the fourth inning, the first of which came off a Blake inside-the-park homer to left field.

Saturday's late-game dramatics likely will only fuel the growing rivalry between the two teams that in some cases is a friendly one.

Blake and Bessingpas-Hamor, who sparked up a friendship while playing summer ball last year, are both juniors who will return next season. While the Wildcats will be looking to return to the glory days that saw them win three titles in a row before Hoopa's two, the Warriors will be on the road for a three-peat of their own.

"I would like another repeat," Hoopa head coach Ryan Ray said. "It's probably going to come down to us and Ferndale again."



? Hoopa pitcher Chenone Blake hugs teammate Fawn Bussell after Blake batted in the winning run on Saturday. ? Hoopa's Fawn Bussell safely slides into home during the fourth inning of Saturday's game as Ferndale catcher Sara Albers defends on the play. Photos by Sean Quincey/ The Eureka Reporter