

## Charting a Weiser course: Del Norte softball wins first-ever NCS Class 2A title

Aaron Finley/For the Times Standard

Article Launched: 05/25/2008 01:31:24 AM PDT  
CRESCENT CITY -- The Del Norte Warriors shook off some early nerves and erased a 2-0 deficit after two innings en route to beating the No. 2 seed Sir Francis Drake Pirates 3-2 to capture the first Redwood Empire 2A softball title in school history.

Things looked grim for the home team early, as Warrior pitcher Alyssa Bergquist walked two of the first three batters she faced, allowing the Pirates to put runners on first and second with just one out. After a stolen base moved runners to second and third, Pirates leadoff batter Cassie Howard, who walked to open the game, scored from third on a fielder's choice off the bat of McKenna Silva.

The Pirates added their second run in the top half of the second, as Melissa Hicks led off with a single followed by an infield base hit off the bat of Taylor Spears. After Maya Tellman grounded into a fielder's choice erasing Spears at second, Bergquist struck out Howard for the second out. Leah Rippe then delivered a two-out single to score Hicks and put the momentum squarely in the Pirates dugout.

"I know the girls were nervous to start the game because I was," Del Norte head coach Jackie Heuberger admitted after the game. "I told them they had a choice to either fall apart and regret it after the game or work hard, make plays and be happy."

That advice sounded simple enough if it hadn't been for the fact that Silva, the Pirates freshman pitcher, was making quick work of what had been a potent Warrior lineup all season long. Silva allowed just one hit, a Paula Rhodes double, over the first three innings and faced just one batter over the minimum in that stretch. The Warriors had a baserunner thrown out attempting to steal in the first, and Rhodes was thrown out at third attempting to stretch her third inning double into a triple.

With Bergquist and the Warrior defense as a whole having settled down after the first two innings, the offense finally began to come to life in the home half of the fourth. Jessica Morrow opened the inning with a single and advanced to second on an error. Lauryn Lesina then doubled into the left center field gap, scoring Morrow from second and cutting the Pirates lead in half. With one out, Michelle Stacey executed a sacrifice bunt, moving Lesina to third before Bergquist hit what appeared to be an inning ending popup to second, only to have the Pirates second baseman drop the ball enabling Lesina to score and keeping the inning alive. Lexie Nelson followed with a single, allowing Sarah Weiser, who came in to pinch-run for Bergquist, to move to third. Weiser later scored on a wild pitch, giving the Warriors a 3-2 lead.

"I told the girls that being down 2-0 meant nothing," Heuberger said. "I'll give their pitcher (Silva) respect, she threw well and she threw hard, but we were too anxious at the plate."

After fighting back to take the lead, Bergquist and her defense took over and shut the proverbial door on the Pirates offense the rest of the way. Bergquist allowed just one hit after the second inning and the Pirates hit exactly two balls out of the infield after inning two. The Pirates did manage to get the potential tying run to second base in the seventh, as Howard led off the inning with a walk and stole

second, but Bergquist struck out Rippe and Wachs in succession before getting Silva to ground out to second for the final out.

"It' s always nice to score early, but it' s always hard to keep an early lead," Pirates head coach Melissa Kirby said. "We had a few mental mistakes, and Del Norte took advantage of those. They (the Warriors) are an aggressive team, and they were able to get timely hits."

Although the names on the backs of the Pirates jerseys may have been very different than a year ago, the fact remained that it was on the very same field a season ago that the Warriors saw their season end at the hands of the Marin County Athletic League school squad.

Not this time, not this Warrior team and not this year.

"The biggest thing in this game was that these girls played well as a team, and we did what they were supposed to do," Heuberger said. "This was the team I' d seen every day in practice. They worked hard for each other all year, and they just love to play softball."