

Del Norte softball all stars bracing to meet all comers

July 3, 2019



When the Del Norte Little League Major Softball All Stars first saw the bracket for the Oregon Little League State Tournament, it appeared as though a matchup with their old nemesis was in store for them.

Del Norte's District 8 is matched up against Wildfire's District 3 when the tournament starts up in Keizer, Oregon on Saturday.

This year's team of Del Norte 10-12 All Stars is coming off back-to-back state tournament appearances and each of the past two years the Wildfire served as a roadblock for Del Norte.

As an 8-10 All Star team in 2017, Del Norte was matched up against the Wildfire in their first game ever, and they were bounced out of the double elimination tournament after two games. Last year, as a 9-11 All Star team, Del Norte ran up against the Wildfire in the semifinal round and the Warriors managed to get revenge — winning the game and moving on to the championship.

But the Wildfire bounced back in the bottom of the bracket to reach the championship game as well, and managed to beat Del Norte in back-to-back games as the Warriors finished as the runners-up.

Del Norte did their part in setting up the rematch, going a perfect 3-0 to sweep the District 8 tournament.

The Wildfire fell short, however, as Pendleton picked up a pair of wins to eliminate the Wildfire and grab District 3's spot at state.

“As soon as we found out that we were going to be matched up with Wildfire’s district they were all talking about how we will probably play that team first,” Curtis said. “Then to see it unfold and have a different team I told them, ‘You are going to be playing that team, or somebody who beat them. So it is going to be a good team that we play.’”

“I think we have seen that and I think they are expecting that. They quickly dropped the whole talk about Wildfire, and have been focused on this new team now.”

Although Del Norte has never faced Pendleton before, they have actually been able to put together a bit of a scouting report.

“The interesting thing is that Wildfire streams their games on Facebook, so we have been able to watch the Pendleton team twice,” Curtis said. “I think it is a good matchup. It is going to be the best competition that we have seen so far, but we are excited for that, and ready for that.”

Curtis said she has seen a lot of similarities between her players and their opponents from Pendleton.

“They have a pitching staff that is as deep as ours,” she said. “I think that they are hittable, but I think they are going to throw strikes if we don’t swing the bat. So we have to be ready to hit. They run the bases aggressively, they play long ball and short ball, so we have to work on different situations and be prepared for what a batter can possibly do in certain situations.”

Curtis said Del Norte has been focusing on various game situations, along with lots of live-ball batting practice in the final week leading up to the tournament.

“I think we have to show up, we have to hit the ball, we have to execute what we are doing, but I like what I am seeing as far as how we will match up with them,” Curtis said. “I think if we can hit the ball better than them and play solid defense we should come out with a win.”

Although this Del Norte team has participated in the state tournament in each of the last two years, this was the first time that the Warriors had any competition in their district. So instead of automatically qualifying for state Del Norte played three games in the District 8 tournament in Medford, Oregon — all three fairly comfortable wins.

“It was a good tournament for us,” Curtis said. “It was a good test and a good little confidence booster for us too, because we had to play to get in for the last two years. Now we had to play to get in and they feel like they deserve to be there — they were not just given something because there is nobody else to play.”

The district tournament also gave the Del Norte coaches a chance to see the girls in action prior to playing the top teams in the state.

“It was really a good opportunity for us to move the girls around and mix things up a little bit,” Curtis said. “It was the first time that I have ever taken a team and had 13 kids. How it works is that each kid has to have a minimum of one at-bat. Once I put somebody into the batting order for somebody else I can switch them in and out. So it was kind of fun to be able to do that. They really all played well as a team. They played where

I told them to and they gave the best effort that they could in those spots. They showed me that we have a really well rounded team. We hit the ball well, we pitched well, and I got to see all three pitchers and all three catchers. So I really got to test the team a little bit and see if what we were seeing at practice was working — and it was.”

Curtis said she has been particularly impressed with the team’s depth of dangerous hitters.

“We have a team that hits the ball really well, not only through the starting lineup, but also when we make substitutions we are still hitting the ball really well,” she said. “I even went back and watched our state tournament games from last year to see what they looked like. The kids are physically bigger and stronger and they are more mature. They also have had a competitive Little League season this year because all three of these pitchers were on different teams. So you really had to work for a win this year. So they are all definitely more battle-tested.”

Del Norte’s Major Softball All Stars are the first of four teams that will be competing in their Oregon Little League State Tournaments this summer. The Minor Softball All Stars are scheduled to start on July 12 in Portland, while both the Major Baseball All Stars and the Junior Baseball All Stars are scheduled to kick off play in Bend, Oregon on July 13.

The Del Norte Senior Baseball All Stars are the only such team in Oregon this year, so they will advance directly to the Regional Tournament July 18-23 in Sacramento.