

Minor softball takes 3rd in pool

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The Del Norte Minor Softball All Stars had a strong showing at the Oregon Little League State Tournament in Portland over the weekend, but ended up one win short of placing in the top two of their pool to advance to the semifinal round.

The Warriors got off to a good start in each of their first two games, and held the lead past the midway point in both contest before a big at bat by their opponents put the game out of reach. Del Norte fell 7-3 against tournament host Beaumont on Friday, followed by a 9-3 loss to Southeach Portland on Saturday.

“Both of our losses were pretty similar in the aspect that we were ahead going into the fourth inning,” said Del Norte head coach John Horner. “We just couldn’t really get our bats going at any time. Defensively we played great because Beaumont and Southeast Portland both hit the ball very well. Our pitchers threw a lot of strikes, so they did a great job of going out and throwing strikes and the defense did well. But in both games, in the fifth inning, we gave up our leads and were unable to get them back.”

The Warriors were able to bounce back for a big 16-1 victory over South Salem on Sunday, however, to finish in third place in their pool.

“That was good for the girls,” Horner said. “It was a tough two losses for the girls so for the girls to go out on Sunday, get the bats going, and be able to bat through the order a couple times. That really raised their spirits and we ended on a great note. But I tell you what, even with the losses the girls kept their heads up and kept battling. That is one thing that I have loved about this group of girls — the never say die attitude that they carried throughout the tournament.”

Horner said he was particularly proud of the class that his team showed throughout the tournament — no matter the outcome.

“The girls played well, and we got lots of compliments about how professional, how disciplined, and how organized our team was. That was cool to hear from not only the officials, but from fans of all the other teams,” Horner said. “They were very gracious winners in the last game. They did a good job of thanking and being humble towards the other team after the game. We got comments on Facebook from parents (of South Salem) commenting on how well our girls graciously won the game on Sunday. That was pretty cool.”

Although Del Norte was hoping to crack the top two in pool play to extend their stay in Portland, Horner reminded the team that this is just the start of a long journey in softball.

“I think the biggest message to the team is that this is just the beginning,” Horner said. “9 and 10 year olds is where Little League starts their tournament play, and they have another five or six years of Little League Tournament ball. This is just another stepping stone — another experience. I told them that we went toe-to-toe with the best that this tournament had, and I felt that when we walked off the field we weren’t outclassed or outplayed by any team that showed up. When it comes to softball it is never a one-game series. That is because anybody can win any game in certain situations. We just had one inning in both of our losses that kind of bit us in the butt. We wish that we could have it back, but that is the way that softball goes.”

This summer has been the first tournament experience for most of the girls on the Minor All Star roster this year. Horner said he believes that the talent is there, but achieving a higher level of success will take more experience.

“I think at times during this tournament nerves got us a little bit in the batters box, and we weren’t able to execute at the plate like we know that we can,” Horner said. “I think that comes with more experience. We need to get more experience in tournament play. We have been talking to the other coaches around the area and are entertaining the idea of playing softball a little bit more than in Little League — maybe some travel softball. I think the biggest takeaway from our tournament, and the 12 to 14 year old team is that more girls need to play more softball if we are going to be more competitive at that level.”

Horner said the highlight of the tournament for Del Norte was the team’s pitching performance, and the impressive hitting of Wah-Kell Stevenson.

“I don’t think we walked more than three or four batters the whole tournament, and Wah-Kell Stevenson’s bat needs to be mentioned because she just smashed the ball the whole tournament,” Horner said. “Other

teams respected her and people started moving back because she had an inside the park home run, a triple, and really hammered the ball.”