



Bulldogs bring home state title

By Nick Eaton - For the Daily World

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SPOKANE — Mikayla Shumate stood on the mound, staring down Castle Rock's Samantha Moore. It was the bottom of the seventh. The Montesano softball team was leading the Class 1A state championship game 3-0. Two out. Two on.

Shumate knew she couldn't load the bases for Rockets' slugger Lacey Seidl, who was on deck.

So Montesano's star pitcher rocketed in another strike, like she had 100 times before in this weekend's state tournament. Moore swung. The ball shot skyward. Then dropped straight down into Shumate's mitt.

Revenge complete.

One year ago, the Bulldogs trudged off the field in Moses Lake after a 10-9 championship-game loss to Castle Rock. In last week's district championship, Montesano lost 4-3 to the Rockets.

On Saturday in Spokane, Castle Rock was doing the trudging. The Montesano girls galloped off, screaming and shrieking and jumping into each other's arms.

They departed Spokane as 1A state fastpitch champions, with a 22-5 overall record. It is Monte's sixth state title in the past 11 years, but its first in the 1A classification.

The Bulldogs had advanced to the title game with a 3-0 win over La Center earlier in the day.

"It's an amazing feeling," Shumate said with a voice hoarse from cheering.

Bulldogs 3, Rockets 0

The winning pitcher in three of Monte's state contests, Shumate threw a two-hitter in the championship game.

Mustering only three hits of their own, the Bulldogs capitalized on Castle Rock mistakes. Two runs came on errors.

It was a tense game from the beginning. The Bulldogs had to be mentally ready to face Samantha Watkins, the Rockets' star pitcher.

After two scoreless innings, Montesano sophomore Erica Rydman opened the top of the third attempting a bunt. That worked, so Teyah Ackley tried a bunt of her own. A Castle Rock error got her to first — and then second safely as Rydman advanced to third.

So, why not try another bunt? Shumate put the ball down in front of third-baseman Kattie Moore, who overthrew first and let Rydman stroll home for the score.

"We can hit the ball," Monte coach Pat Pace jokingly reassured. "But we are also really good with the small game, and if that's going to win us championships, then that's what we're going to use."

In fact, he said, the Bulldogs started asking their coaches if they could lay down more bunts. They had figured out a Castle Rock weakness, and they wanted to exploit it.

Tori Erickson opened the Montesano seventh with a single to left field, then found herself safe at third after another Castle Rock error let Rachelle Ridout reach second.

Rydman shot another single out into left field, scoring Erickson and Ridout and ultimately sealing the Bulldogs' victory.

"When you keep the ball in play, like we did, it really forces them to execute and mistakes were made," Pace said of Castle Rock. "And I think that was kind of the key for us, is the fact that we kept the pressure on the corners and once we saw that they were going to rush throws, it was our golden opportunity."

"Castle Rock may hit the ball farther than we do, but we'll take anybody on when it comes to playing short ball."

Shumate, pitching her 21st inning of the weekend, struck out the first two in the seventh before allowing a double and a walk. That's when she popped up Moore and saved the game.

Bulldogs 3, Wildcats 0

Shumate tossed a four-hitter and errors again gave the Bulldogs the edge they needed in the semifinal.

In the third inning, after Shumate doubled to left field, Liz Hartman dropped down a bunt. The throw to first was wild and Shumate came in to put Monte on the board.

Courtney Lloyd was called out at first on a fielder's choice, but the ensuing throw to third base was off the mark. Hartman ran home. Tori Erickson followed with a stand-up triple to left field but was stranded at third.

Montesano's third run came in the fifth inning, when Erickson doubled into center field, scoring Aubree Pocklington from second base.

"It felt really awesome because our team was just working together just like we needed to do to win that game," Hartman said. "We did everything possible. Our bats were awesome and we played some awesome defense."

Awesome defense highlighted by two double plays and heads-up play by catcher Pocklington. In the third, she snagged Shay Cheeseman's foul bunt in the air and picked off Ashley Mate stealing second.

"We just know what it takes to win a state championship, and we did it this year. We worked very hard, gave it our best all year long," junior Shumate said. "We're all best friends — even if there wasn't softball we'd still be hanging out every day."

The team will lose just two players — Ackley and Hartman — to graduation. Pace and his players think their camaraderie will roll over into next season.

And for those who are leaving, they got the perfect ending.

"It's really emotional and I'm just happy that this year we just won first," Ackley said. "It's just a really great feeling. And I love them all and I'm going to be here next year watching them."

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RBI: Montesano — Erickson. Triples: Montesano — Erickson. Doubles: Montesano — Erickson.

Winning pitcher — Shumate (walked two; struck out eight). Losing pitcher — Hanover (walked three; struck out seven).

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RBI: Montesano — E. Rydman 2. Doubles: Montesano — Shumate. Castle Rock — A. Moore.

Winning pitcher — Shumate (walked two; struck out seven). Losing pitcher — Watkins (walked none; struck out three).