

Cosmos throttle Otter Valley

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SPRINGFIELD — Otter Valley fell 18-6 in five innings to Springfield on Saturday, but sometimes the score is not the most important thing about the game. Sometimes you have to look beyond the box score.

Otter Valley starting pitcher Riley Keith was getting to play a sport for the first time this school year. After missing the field hockey and basketball seasons, she finally got to go out and compete.

It had to feel good and nobody could identify with that feeling more than Springfield second baseman Ari Cioffi who also joined the Cosmos late this season after being sidelined by ankle surgery following a soccer injury.

"At first, there wasn't going to be any softball at all," Cioffi said. "But the recovery went better than planned."

Cioffi worked hard on her rehabilitation, doing everything her physical therapist prescribed to the letter.

She ignited the offense by going 2-for-2 and reaching base all four times. Twice she was hit by a pitch. She drove in two runs.

Keith did not have the return to sports that she wanted. The Cosmos scored seven runs in the first on no base hits. They were the recipients of seven walks and three hits batsmen in the frame.

"You take what you can get in this game," Springfield coach Andy Bladyka said.

"I was thrilled to see Riley back out there.

"She is coming back from an injury and you could tell that she is going to get better. It's just nice to see her back."

Otter Valley coach Kelly Trayah said Keith was having trouble adjusting to pitching with the knee brace, hitting her hand on it when she was releasing the ball.

She had good velocity and indicated that it is a matter of time before she adds quality depth to OV's stable of pitchers.

Bladyka was missing two of his best players who bat in the No. 2 and No. 4 spots in the order. Maddie Clark and Haley Streeter were doing clinicals for a special program because they will be majoring in nursing in college.

"They aren't allowed to pick the day," Bladyka said.

What really pleased Bladyka was the way the bottom third of his order hit. Megan Stagner, Madison Knight and Malia Findley had good swings and made contact all day. Knight and Findley had two hits apiece and accounted for three RBIs between them.

"I loved the way those three were hitting line drives," Bladyka said.

Jadynn Pope had an RBI single for the Otters in the top of the first when they grabbed a 2-0 lead.

The Cosmos scored the seven in the first and five more in the second to take a 12-2 lead.

The key blow in that inning was a two-run single by Cioffi. Findley, Molly Leonard and Tori Otis also had RBI singles in the frame.

The Otters tried to extend the game beyond the mercy rule by scoring three times in the fourth to pare the margin to 16-6.

Marissa Connors, the hero of Friday night's 7-6 win over Fair Haven, had the only hit of the inning. Josie Cone picked up an RBI on a ground out.

But the Cosmos put the 12-run rule in play by scoring twice in the fourth. Jill Muther had a hit in the inning and Knight an RBI single.

Izzy Belisle started in the circle for the Cosmos and had five strikeouts over her 3 1/3 innings.

She had some soreness in her back and Muther finished up, pitching well to end the game after the top of the fifth.

The win lifted the Cosmos' record to 7-2. They host Rutland in a doubleheader on Tuesday.

The Otters fell to 3-7.

"This was a really good win for us, to get it without our No. 2 and No. 4 hitters," Bladyka said.

"Izzy had been carrying us much of the time. The offense stepped up today when it had to."

"We never got back from that first inning," Trayah said.

He is confident Keith will make the adjustment needed.

"The whole thing is a new adventure," Trayah said.

Leonard, Cioffi, Knight and Findley each had two hits for the Cosmos. Leonard sliced a single to right that got past the outfield, allowing Leonard to circle the bases.

Mia Politano had a double and scored two runs for the Otters.