

4AAAAA championship goes to decisive game

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Harrison's Sierra Maddox, center, high-fives Kayla Caruso after scoring on Caruso's fly ball in the second game of Wednesday's Region 4AAAAA championship against Hillgrove.

Staff photo by Jon-Michael Sullivan

KENNESAW — After combining for three runs in a 2-1 Hillgrove victory in Game 1, the Lady Hawks and Harrison totaled 19 in the nightcap — including nine in the eighth inning.

But it was the host Lady Hoyas who won 10-9 in Game 2 to split the first day of the best-of-three Region 4AAAAA championship series Wednesday at Clackum Field.

Because of that, the two region rivals will play a decisive third game today at 5:55 p.m. at Clackum Field.

Game 2 was a back-and-forth affair that saw top-seeded Harrison (23-3) battle back from a 3-2 deficit in the fourth to take a 5-3 lead into the bottom of the fifth. But an RBI single from Hillgrove's Meredith Heyer scored Maisie Steed to cut the margin to 5-4, and Heyer's one-out home run in the bottom of the seventh tied the contest at 5-all.

That's where the score stood going into extra innings — and where the game got a little out of hand.

With a runner placed on second base due to the international tie-breaker rule, Harrison managed to plate five runs on four hits and an error in the eighth. Amber Broome singled home Amy Koenig and Jesse Giles, while Kaci Giles plated Dresden Maddox and Broome for a 9-5 lead.

Sierra Maddox's RBI single scored Rachel Gardiner before Hillgrove reliever Rachel Jarvis got the final three outs for the second-seeded Lady Hawks (22-9), who trailed 10-5 entering the bottom half of the frame.

But Hillgrove put on a rally of its own, plating four runs on three hits and an error before leaving two runners on base to end the game.

Qiley Lewis' one-out RBI single scored Mikaela Scott, and Steed reached on an error that also plated Brittany Ferrell to cut Harrison's lead to 10-7. A two-out RBI double from Taylor Vennel scored Maddie Garner and Steed to make it 10-9, but reliever Kayla Caruso struck out the final batter with runners on first and second to even the series.

"Those were just two really good teams going at each other (Wednesday)," Hillgrove coach Jason Campbell said. "We both had our chances in both games. I applaud my team for not laying down in that eighth inning and scoring four runs."

Each team totaled 13 hits in the second game.

Broome was 3-for-4 with two RBIs for Harrison, Dresden Maddox batted 2-for-4 with a RBI and Rachel Gardiner was 1-for-3 with an RBI. Koenig and Kaci Giles each had two RBIs, while Sierra Maddox was 3-for-5 with an RBI. Kellie Carroll scored two runs and Paige Favor also scored. Courtney Sutter and Jesse Giles each had a hit.

Dresden Maddox gave up five runs — two earned — on 10 hits and struck out 11 in 6 1/3 innings, while Caruso allowed four runs — three earned — on three hits in 1 2/3 innings of relief.

Steed batted 2-for-4 with a home run, three runs scored and an RBI to lead Hillgrove. Vennel had two RBIs, as did Heyer, who was 2-for-4 with her homer in the seventh. Abby Akins batted 2-for-3 and Ferrell was 3-for-4. Kia Lang and Mikaela Scott each scored a run.

Abby Evans allowed 10 runs — eight earned — on 12 hits and struck out eight for Hillgrove.

Game 1 wasn't nearly as exciting — at least offensively — but it was just as dramatic as Hillgrove rallying from a 1-0 first-inning deficit to take the win.

Caruso's RBI single in the first plated Kaci Giles for Harrison's 1-0 lead.

But two errors in the third helped Steed score to tie the contest at 1-all, and Ashley Allen's two-out RBI single in the fifth plated Steed — who scored five times in the doubleheader — to give Hillgrove the lead it would not relinquish.

Harrison left runners on base in every inning except the seventh, while Hillgrove left the bases loaded in the fourth.

"At the end of the day, we want to win the region championship," Harrison coach Olivia Petersen said, "but it's good to have close games like this late in the season against quality opponents like Hillgrove to prepare us for the playoffs.

"Errors hurt us in the first game, and we hit the ball, but left a lot of people on. We hit the ball better in Game 2."