

Chiefland Girls Capture State Softball Championship



The 2014 Chiefland High School Class 1A state softball champions are pictured. Shown from the left: BACK ROW - Bat Boy Ashton Weatherford, Coach Amber Richardson, Head Coach Wayne Weatherford, Takiya London, Coach Harland Stalvey, Coach Brian Gore; MIDDLE ROW - Lauren Stalvey, Tot Barnes, Lauren Parker, Morgan Blandin, Aleaha Rhoomes, Samantha Rolfe, Morgan Anderson, Jeana Rosales; FRONT ROW - Sydney Parks, Brittany Gilliam, Emily Hallman, Kelsi Alexander, Hannah Gore. Photo courtesy of Amy Anderson.

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

Chiefland's young varsity girls' softball team won the state Class 1A softball championship Saturday with solid pitching, relentless hitting, never getting rattled and being faithful to their practice of praying before and after the game. The team gathered in a circle before the trip to Vero Beach Thursday to ask for protection and a safe trip to the final four, and after defeating Jay 9-2 for the championship they formed a circle around the pitcher's mound to hold hands, bow their heads and give thanks.

Coach Wayne Weatherford said someone wondered out loud before the girls walked

to the mound if they might be criticized for offering a prayer, but the girls felt it was important to give thanks for the victory, which was something they had been doing all year.

"As soon as the game ended, they said, 'It's not over. We haven't given thanks for what he gave us'," Weatherford said. "These girls truly believe in God and they believe he carried us through this game."

Weatherford said the six freshman starters on the team and the other girls were attentive on the trip to Vero Beach when senior Kelsi Alexander read scripture to them. Alexander selected scripture that was inspirational to her. She read scripture a couple of times.

The Chiefland team felled several giants on their way to Chiefland High School's first state softball title.

The Lady Indians toppled the undefeated Dixie County Bears 3-2 for the regional championship and the right to advance to the final four. Once again, prayer played a role. One of the parents entered the dugout before the game and started to read scripture from Philippians that all things are possible through God, according to Weatherford. Dixie County had beaten Chiefland 3-2 for the District title earlier. The Lady Indians turned the tables on Dixie County in the regional title game. In Vero Beach, Chiefland beat No. 3 ranked Sneads 12-2 Friday night to advance to the championship round and topped No. 2 ranked Jay 9-2 for the state title the following night. Chiefland was ranked No. 6 going into the tournament.

Weatherford's wife, Lena, who keeps statistics for the team, said Chiefland made few mistakes and never lost confidence in their ability to win.

"These girls; they never get rattled. It doesn't matter the circumstances, they remain cool and calm. I've never seen them get down," she said.



Coach Wayne Weatherford and his team gather for prayer before they head south to Vero Beach to play in the final four of the state softball championship. Photo by Terry Witt.

Chiefland was ranked No. 6 going into the tournament.

In the state championship game and the semi-final game, sophomore Lauren Stalvey was unstoppable. She pitched all seven innings in both games.



Chiefland team members enjoy the moment as they ride past their cheering fans on campus before heading south to the state tournament. *Photo by Terry Witt.*

Coach Wayne Weatherford said Stalvey moved the ball around plate and kept batters off balance. "I so underestimated her at the beginning of the season," Weatherford said. "Toward the end she was on fire."

Chiefland peaked at the right time, outscoring opponents 30-6 in the final five games and beating the top three ranked Class 1A teams in Florida. In the win over Sneads, Chiefland scored seven runs in the 7th inning to underscore its hitting power. In the championship game, the Lady Indians scored four runs in the 7th inning.

Weatherford said he emphasized hitting in practices. Each of the girls was required to swing at 150 pitches every practice. They never complained.

Chiefland has two seniors. Brittany Gilliam, the only player for Chiefland named to the All-Star team by Florida High School Athletic Association Director Shelton Crews, and Alexander. Weatherford said they were great leaders. They transmitted his orders to the girls.

Chiefland's statistics for the state championship game:

Emily Hallman 3 at bats, 2 runs, 2 hits; Brittany Gilliam 3 at bats 2 run, 1 hit, 1 RBI; Lauren Parker 4 at bats, 1 run, 3 hits, 2 RBI; Takia London 4 at bats, 1 hit; Tataneisha Barnes 3 at bats, 1 run; Samantha Rolfe 3 at bats, 2 runs, 2 hits, 1 RBI; Kelsi Alexander 2 at bats, 1 run, 2 hits; Morgan Anderson 3 at bats, 1 hit, 1 RBI; Sidney Parks 1 hit; Hanna Gore, no hits.

Lauren Stalvey pitched 7 innings, gave up two runs, 1 earned run, two walks and had 1 strike out.

Chiefland scored twice in the second, twice in the third, once in the fourth and four in the sixth. The Lady Indians had 1 error. The Lady Indians collected 13 hits to Jay's 2.

Chiefland stats against Sneads in semi-final game:

Emily Hallman 4 at bats, 3 runs, 3 hits; Brittany Gilliam 3 at bats 3 runs, 3 hits; Lauren Parker 4 at bats, 1 run, 2 hits, 3 RBI; Takia London 4 at bats, 2 runs, 3 hits, 1 RBI; Tataneisha Barnes 3 at bats, 1 run, 1 hit, 1 RBI; Sidney Parks 3 at bats, 1 run, 1 hit, 1 RBI; Samatha Rolfe 1 at bat, 1 run, 1 hit, 1 RBI; Kelsi Alexander 4 no hits; Morgan Anderson no hits; Hanna Gore 3 at bats, 1 run, 1 hit.

Lauren Stalvey pitched for 7 innings, gave up 6 hits, 2 runs, 1 earned run, 1 walk and struck out 5.

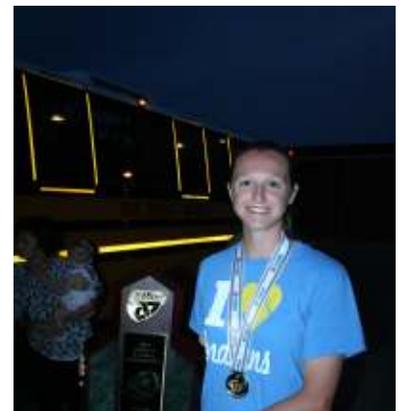
Chiefland had 14 hits in the game, Sneads 6 hits.

The victory for Weatherford had spiritual significance even beyond the game itself. In 2007 he retired as the coach when he became gravely ill. Chiefland had gone to the final four in 2007 behind the pitching of his daughter Megan. He returned to the head coaching spot last year.

On Saturday night, Wayne and Lena Weatherford returned home with the state trophy on an empty Levy County school bus. All the girls had gone home with their parents from Vero Beach. When the bus arrived at the CHS parking lot Weatherford was greeted with a big hug from his daughter. His infant grandchild, Stella, was part of a crowd of about 20 friends and family who snapped photos and congratulated the Weatherfords.

Someone had decorated Weatherford's truck with signs congratulating him on winning the state softball championship.

"It's been a prayer for me to come back," he said.



Senior Brittany Gilliam was named to the All Star team by the Florida High School Athletic Association. *Photo by Terry Witt.*