

WAGS Thunder captures title

CHRIS HAGAN Statesman Journal

August 6, 2007

The members of the WAGS Thunder softball team crowded around the merchandise booth at Wallace Marine Park, all waiting for one thing. The press stamped down on the tournament sweatshirts they had all purchased earlier in the weekend, adding one last piece of vindication to make their Class B 16U ASA Western National title official.

"At first it didn't really seem real," winning pitcher Stefany Valentino said. "Not until the trophies and pictures and getting our shirts with 'Champion' on them."

The Thunder, from Southern California, beat the Lake Oswego Renegades 5-0 Sunday in the championship game, capping off the tournament which started with 36 teams Friday.

The competition brought teams from Oregon, Washington, Arizona, California and Idaho.

Valentino pitched a complete game shutout, giving up only six hits. Despite playing their fourth game of the day, Valentino said the team wasn't tired, though there were a few nerves.

"We were actually really pumped up," she said. "Some of us were a little nervous. After the first inning I really calmed down."

The Renegades were the tired team. After losing in the semifinal matchup with the Thunder at noon, the Renegades came back and beat the Bellevue Blast from Washington 2-1 at 2 p.m. to get into the championship game at 4 p.m.

The Thunder took advantage early, scoring three runs in the second and two in the third to go up 5-0.

"A couple of kids made errors they wouldn't normally make," Renegades manager Gary Walsworth said.

"But we don't want to make any excuses, we have to be prepared for that."

Valentino's only trouble came in the sixth. Lake Oswego's Melonie Walsworth led off with a double and reached third on a passed ball.

Valentino's father and team pitching coach Stefan Valentino came out to calm his daughter down.

"I said, 'I really want you to focus on your velocity, let's get out of this inning,' " Stefan said.

Stefany did more than that, setting down the next six batters to finish the game. Stefan said the championship is something the team has been working to all year.



LORI CAIN | Statesman Journal

The WAGS Thunder celebrate their victory against the Lake Oswego Renegades in their battle for first place Sunday in the ASA 16B Western National championship tournament at Wallace Marine Park.

About the event

What: ASA 16B Western National Championship

Number of teams: 36

Champion: WAGS Thunder, Westlake-Aguora, Calif.

Second place: Lake Oswego Renegades

Third place: Bellevue Blast

"Our motto this year was 'Three, two, one,' " he said. "Third in district, second at state and first at nationals."

Gary Walsworth said he was proud of how his team competed even as the innings dropped away.

"No one on our team gave up, we were still diving for everything," he said. "I think we represented the state of Oregon very well."

One team from Salem, the Lumbre Wildfire, entered the tournament.

The team lost its opening game Friday 3-2 to the Goleta All-Stars and then lost 6-3 Saturday to Mission Viejo.

As the highest level ASA tournament for the classification, the Western National was also an achievement for the umpiring crew.

Like the teams themselves, the umpires came from all over the Western United States.

"I love the game of softball, I love being around it," Steve Matthews of Anchorage, Alaska, the third base umpire for the championship game, said.

"This is a national," umpire Jim Johnson of Seattle said. "This is what you work for."

The tournament was also a showcase for the City of Salem, which took over softball operations for the city from a private contractor last year. The city, behind softball recreation coordinator Nancy Aiken parks operation manager Bruce Bolton, worked to improve the Wallace complex and softball programs in the city.

Those involved with the tournament seemed happy with how it was all pulled off.

"This field, the facilities were very nice," Anne Imus, coach of the Blast, said. "All the games started on time which is unheard of in a tournament."

Aiken was also pleased with the event, though ready for the event to end.

"I can't say I'm glad it's over, but there are two sides to it," she said, letting out a sigh of relief.

chagan@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6702