

Lady Horsemen Invitational: St. Michael's beat Moriarty 3-1 for title

By James Barron

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How is this for measuring sticks?

The last time St. Michael's won its Lady Horsemen Invitational softball tournament, it took third place in the Class 3A (now 4A) State Tournament in May.

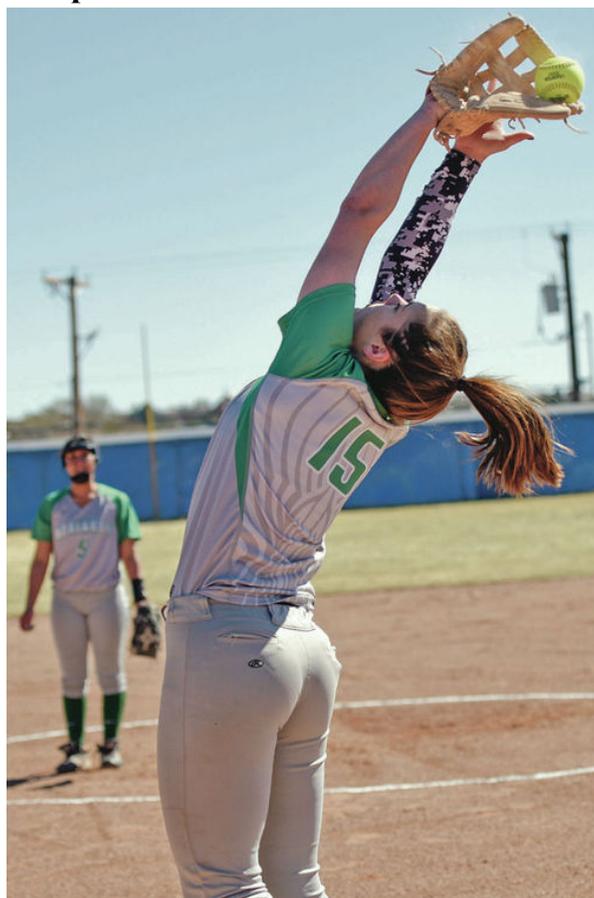
The last time the Lady Horsemen started off this well — a 6-1 record in 2006 — they reached the state championship game.

On Saturday, St. Michael's measured itself against one of the top programs in 5A — the Moriarty Lady Pintos — and showed they were equals, and maybe a little more than that. Allie Berhost tossed a three-hitter, and helped the Lady Horsemen to an early 2-0 lead that bloomed into a 3-1 win in the Lady Horsemen title game at Christian Brothers Athletic Complex.

At 7-0, it is the best start by the program in more than a decade. The win, though, was just as important because Moriarty provided the stiffest competition yet for the Lady Horsemen, who rolled through pool play by outscoring Albuquerque Academy and Hatch Valley by a combined 30-0 count. This was a test they wanted.

“The kids were excited to step up to the challenge of Moriarty,” St. Michael's interim head coach Deborah Garcia said. “I truly believe in their hearts, they were going to beat Moriarty. It was nice they were going to come up against a more challenging team today.”

After Friday afternoon's action, though, it appeared St. Michael's and Taos were going to battle for the tournament title. However, Garcia and assistant coach Ron Noedel realized by Friday night they had



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Moriarty's Mariah Peterson leaps to catch a hit during the first inning Saturday of the Lady Horseman Invitational at St. Michael's High School. The Lady Horsemen beat Moriarty 3-1 to win their own tournament. Luke E. Montavon/The New Mexican

separated teams into two pools and needed to set up the top teams from each one against each other.

Taos and St. Michael's went undefeated in one pool, and the Lady Horsemen won it by virtue of a plus-30 run differential to the lady Tigers' plus-20. Moriarty (7-3) and Las Vegas Robertson were undefeated in the other pool, and the Lady Pintos advanced by a single run (plus-11 versus plus-10).

St. Michael's didn't waste the opportunity it had against the Lady Pintos. Mikayla bloomed a single to center field in the bottom of the first, then scored on Berhost's triple to right-center field. Berhost then scored on a wild pitch by Kodie Aceves for a 2-0 lead.

Berhost made the lead stick. She didn't allow a hit through the first three innings before encountering her first bit of trouble in the fourth. Mariah Peterson and Aceves had consecutive singles with one out, then Lydia Schmutz brought Peterson home with a groundout to first for a 2-1 margin. With Aceves at third and two outs, Berhost struck out Alina Gonzales to quell the threat.

Berhost said getting an early lead helped settle the Lady Horsemen down.

"To know that we had that lead going into the next inning and that we had the advantage on them, it helped us out a lot," Berhost said. "And it made us hungry, we always want more."

But so did the Lady Pintos. They pushed the issue again in the sixth with a Kristina Trumbull infield hit and a hit batsman when Berhost plunked Peterson on the left wrist. Aceves extracted a walk to load the bases with one out, setting the stage for Schmutz.

But her grounder went straight to Berhost, who then started a 1-2-3 double play to end the rally.

"We talked about what went on there," Noedel said. "We wanted to make sure the catcher [Anjelique Martinez] gets in front of the plate, and when she throws to the first baseman, make sure she is inside the baseline. We don't want to hit [the runner] in the back. A lot of bad things can happen, even though it's a simple ground ball to the pitcher. They executed it perfectly."

Perfect execution gave way to opportunistic hitting when Martinez stepped up to the plate in the bottom of the frame and two outs. Leyba had reached base on a throwing error by Aceves on her bunt, and moved to third on Berhost's groundout to set the moment for Martinez.

In a seven-pitch battle, Martinez slipped a double down the third-base line to score Leyba with an insurance run that Berhost didn't really need. She threw just five pitches to retire Moriarty in the seventh to secure the win.

"This gives us confidence," Berhost said. "Yesterday and the day before, we weren't tested really well. We knew we were going to come in here with a big test."

It was the first of many big tests, but the Lady Horsemen have passed the ones in front of them.

In other games on Saturday:

Third place

Las Vegas Robertson 15, Taos 0 (three innings)

The Lady Cardinals might have felt the sting of missing out on the tournament championship, but they put a hurting on the Lady Tigers. They scored 12 runs in the first inning on their District 2-4A foes and rolled to the mercy-rule win for third place.

Savannah Sanchez had a first-inning home run for Robertson (7-0), while Taos (4-3) managed just two base runners on the day.

Fifth place**Bernalillo 9, Abq. Academy 0**

Shauncey Masa fired a two-hitter to lead the Lady Spartans past the Lady Chargers for fifth place. Bernalillo gave her a 4-0 lead to work with after two innings, and she breezed from there.

Seventh place**Pojoaque Valley 10, Española Valley 9**

The Elkettes scored two runs in the sixth to take seventh over the Lady Sundevils in the morning game. Pojoaque improved to 2-2 on the season, while Española fell to 4-3.