

Wilkins provides game-winning hit in 1-0 win over Mooney

Hilton avenges defeat of 1985 tourney final

By Richard A. Kiley

Hilton's Kelly Wilkins satisfied her team's year-long hunger during a two-hour marathon game last Friday night at McAvoy Park.

No, the senior didn't splurge for chicken wings at the Winfield Grill, located down the road from the Irondequoit park.

She did, however, serve her team a run-scoring single with two outs in the bottom of the 10th inning, to give the Cadets a 1-0 win over Cardinal Mooney in the final of the Section 5 Class AA tournament.

Hilton hungered all season to avenge a 17-2 rout by the Cardinals in last year's championship game (although Hilton did defeat the Cardinals 5-1 in a less important game earlier in the season).

Thanks to Wilkins, this year's squad can savor the taste of being Class AA champs for at least a year.

"Mr. Buck (Cadets coach James Buck) gave me a good-luck kiss before I came to bat," said Wilkins, who broke her eyeglasses in a post-game celebration. "All he said was, 'You're due' and 'Go for the hit!'"

Wilkins didn't disappoint Buck, her teammates, or the Hilton faithful among the more than 400 fans in attendance. The center fielder's hit down the left side of the infield plated Leanne Henner from third base.

Mooney shortstop Lori Padulo did her best to smother the ball, but her throw (on her knees) was too late to get Wilkins at first base.

Ironically, in part because of Padulo, the Cadets were held scoreless during regulation. Padulo, who had a part in 11 put-outs, put on a fielding clinic. One gem came in the bottom of the sixth inning, when her acrobatic tag of Ann Nitzenberg, as the latter tried to steal second base, averted any hopes of a Hilton score.

Defensive play was superb on both sides. "We knew Mooney was a good team; they made a lot of good defensive plays and so did we," Wilkins said. "We all thought it would be a close game."

The two main reasons the game was scoreless throughout was the pitching prowess of both Hilton's Bridgette Newman (named tournament MVP) and Mooney's Julie Staub.

Newman, in victory, had to work a bit harder than Staub. The junior (that's right, junior, so she'll be back next year) worked out of jams in the fourth, seventh, and ninth innings, but shut the door on Joette Abbey's squad every time.

"We just felt if Bridgette was on tonight we would win," Wilkins said. "And she's been on all season!"

By far the closest either team came to scoring in regulation play was the fourth inning. With two outs, Josette Riola reached on an error. Then, with Riola running on the pitch, Padulo laced a hit to rightfielder Kris Berback. After she misplayed the hit at first, Berback recovered the ball and nailed Riola at the plate with a perfect strike to catcher Jenny Loughlin.

It looked as if McAvoy Park was going to have several hundred tents pitched for the night before Wilkins provided her 10th-inning heroics.

The stage was set when Henner reached on an error and advanced to third after successful sacrifice bunts by Loughlin and Pam Simonds.

Wilkins then served up the winning run. An obviously pleased Buck, in his 13th year with Hilton, relished the moment. "I knew it was going to be a tough game, but this team has come through for me all year," Buck said.

For Hilton, 22-1 on the season, it was the culmination of a dream season.

"I thought we were going to have a real fine season," Buck said in reflection. "I knew right from the beginning that they (his Hilton players) were a great bunch of kids. Every coach should have the opportunity I did this year."

In addition to Newman, Hilton's Nitzenberg, Loughlin, Wilkins and Diane Gallagher were all named to the all-tournament team.

For Mooney, which ended the season at 15-6, Padulo, Riola, Tracy Schmidt and Staub were tabbed with all-tournament honors.

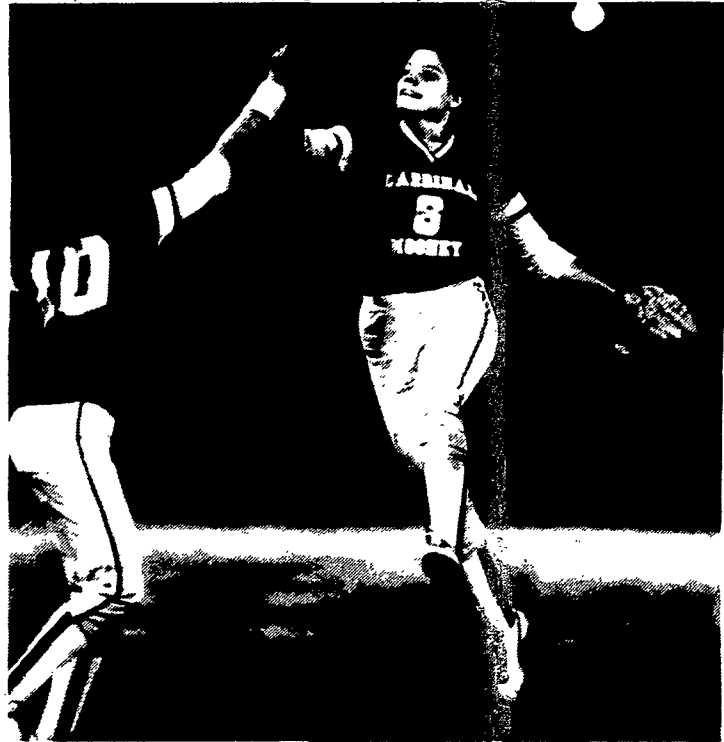
Mooney would not have been playing for the title if it weren't for Riola's two-run home run in the bottom of the seventh inning, during a 5-4 victory over sixth-seeded Fairport.



Theresa Nietopski looks on in disbelief as she's called out at third base in the seventh inning against Fairport. Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



Above right, Mooney's Josette Riola and Lori Padulo exchange high-fives after Riola's grab off the bat of Hilton's Jill Heise in the eighth inning. Above left, despite disappointment over the game's outcome, Theresa Nietopski and Padulo applaud the new champions of Class AA.



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