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Extra Bases

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SOFTBALL

Down to the wire

With playoffs on the horizon, it is win-or-go-home time for teams in districts 6-5A and 7-5A. With only two regular-season games left, four teams in 7-5A -- Martin, Lamar, Arlington and Duncanville -- are fighting for three postseason spots.

Of them, Lamar has the most difficult road, playing tonight at Duncanville (15-11, 9-3) and at Arlington (20-9, 10-2) on Friday. However, with a win tonight, Lamar would clinch a playoff berth.

"The Duncanville game will be the turning point of our season," Lamar coach Jessica Alaniz said. "If we lose, it will be difficult to get in; if we win, we're in. The girls are excited and ready for the challenge. We weren't expected to be in this position this season, and we want to finish strong and make the playoffs."

The Lady Vikings (10-8, 9-3) have made the playoffs the past three seasons.

In District 6-5A, South Grand Prairie will try to fend off its closest challengers to clinch the title. Tonight, the first-place Lady Warriors (12-10, 9-3) play at second-place Trinity (13-10, 8-4), and Friday, they meet second-place Coppell (18-9, 8-4). A win tonight would ensure South Grand Prairie a playoff spot.

Five teams are jockeying for the three playoff spots from the district.

Hot hitting

Though Bowie will not make the postseason, it could play the role of District 7-5A spoiler. The Lady Volunteers (10-20, 3-9) trounced their past two opponents, Sam Houston and DeSoto, by a combined score of 23-4. In the victories, Bowie recorded 26 hits, and pitcher Alex Alkire allowed only six.

"We're finally playing to our potential," coach Kari Kitchens said. "We've started to relax and listen to each other. We're excited, motivated and have the desire to finish the season out strong."

Bowie plays first-place Martin (21-5, 10-2) at 8 tonight at the Workman Junior High softball complex.

By a whisker

Trailing 6-3, Mansfield scored two runs in the bottom of both the fifth and sixth innings to beat North Crowley 7-6 on Friday night. The win was the third consecutive one-run victory for District 4-5A's second-place Lady Tigers (15-6, 8-2).

At 5:30 p.m. today, they play at first-place Burleson (19-7, 9-1). In the teams' first meeting, Burleson pitcher Sarah Odom allowed only two hits and struck out 12 in a 2-0 win.

McFatter leading Summit

Paschal won't miss facing Summit pitcher Kallie McFatter.

The Panthers won't miss pitching to her, either.

On Friday night, McFatter led the Lady Jaguars to a 2-0 win over Paschal, throwing a two-hit shutout and breaking the scoreless tie with an RBI single in the top of the fifth. The win moved Summit (16-7, 7-3) into third place in District 4-5A.

BASEBALL

Sophomore spark

After losing on back-to-back Fridays, Lamar rebounded last week with a 7-2 win over Sam Houston, and sophomore pitcher **Zach Sperry** figured heavily in the victory.

Sperry, who was first called up to varsity to pitch in tournaments, has earned a permanent spot on the team with a 0.58 ERA in 24 1/3 innings this season. He has often pitched in relief, but Friday, Sperry got the start and his second victory. He's 2-0 with 24 strikeouts and a .189 opponents' batting average.

"It's been a nice surprise for him to step up and pitch as well as he has all season," coach Paul Kino said.

Tristan Bugenis (4-1) remains the No. 1 starter, while Sperry and Clint Dunham (2-3, 4.50) have made Friday starts. The pitcher who doesn't start among those two gives the Vikings another option in long relief.

Catching on

As Mansfield continues its dominating run through District 4-5A, the pitching of juniors Mark Cohoon and Jordan Walden, who have combined to go 12-0, has been the most consistent key to victory.

But catcher Brandon Bantz grabbed some of the limelight last week with a superb performance at the plate in wins over Weatherford and Boswell. Bantz was 3-for-4 with a double and a home run against the Kangaroos on Tuesday. He followed that Friday with another homer and another double, going 2-for-3.

For the season, Bantz is hitting .400 with 26 RBI, nine doubles and a team-high six home runs.

"It's his whole approach to things his senior year," coach Gary Vaughan said. "You couldn't ask for someone that works harder."

Bantz also plays a crucial role in the success of the Tigers' pitching staff, Vaughan said.

"On a lot of hitters, we turn him loose to call some of the pitches. And our pitchers have great confidence in him," Vaughn said.

Taking the lead

The jumble at the top of the District 7-5A standings will disappear tonight, when Duncanville visits Martin. The winner will improve to 8-1 in district and take sole possession of first place.

The Panthers and Warriors last met at Duncanville on March 15, a cold, windy night. The conditions played into the hands of Martin starter Nathan Karns, who didn't allow a hit through five innings and allowed only two unearned runs on an error that should have ended the game.

"It was 42 degrees with the wind chill about 30, and a guy throwing pretty hard makes it tough to get in there and bear down," Martin coach Curt Culbertson said. "I would hope that he could repeat that, but it's difficult against anybody that's already seen you."

Although the winner of tonight's game will take the district lead, Lamar and Arlington could both be two games back -- and one behind tonight's loser -- with five to play.

"There are teams left on both of our schedules that we have to worry about," Culbertson said.