

The Pueblo Chieftain

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Colts ride solid hitting into host playoff berth

By TRACY RENCK
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Erica Christie picked the right time to have a good day.

The South High School softball standout knocked in four runs, powering the Colts to a 5-0 win over East Saturday morning in the final South-Central League regular season game for both teams at City Park.

"Their pitcher (Kayla Tapia) was throwing the ball right down the pipe and I was seeing the ball clear," said Christie, who had a two-run double and a two-run inside-the-park homer. "I just wanted to beat East so bad and it's awesome to help my team win."

The Colts' victory upped their record to 12-7 overall and more importantly clinched the S-CL crown for them with an 11-1 record. East dropped to 11-7 overall and to 9-3 in league.

"I'm very excited that we were able to win the S-CL championship," veteran South coach Rick Reyes said. "Overall, we played pretty solid (Saturday)." South, East and Central - which were the top three finishers in the S-CL - qualified for the 32-team Class 4A regional tournament field. The Wildcats claimed the final automatic league bid by virtue of defeating Centennial 7-0 Saturday morning at City Park. Central and Centennial finished with identical 7-5 league records and they split their season series 1-1. The Wildcats, however, were awarded third since they defeated South, the league champ, 2-1 on Sept. 30.

Centennial now must wait and see if it receives one of the three at-large bids when the regional bracket is released today by the Colorado High School Activities Association. CHSAA could have awarded up to four at-large bids, but that number was reduced to three since Mullen took one of the bids by winning the Centennial League. Today, CHSAA also will unveil the eight, four-team regional sites. All the regional games will take place on Saturday.

The top two finishers from the eight Class 4A regionals will advance to the Class 4A state tourney Oct. 17-18 at Aurora Sports Park.

"I'm just so happy for my kids right now," Central coach Larry Romero said. "The kids are playing so well and we're peaking at the right time."

The Wildcats lost to Ralston Valley 2-0 a year ago in the state finals.

As for Christie, she wasted no time in punishing East. The cleanup hitter smacked a double to the left-centerfield gap in the bottom of the first inning, scoring Molly Thiebaut and Jordan Bailey.

Christie stretched the Colts' advantage to 4-0 when she blasted a ball to the right field fence. By the time the Eagles threw the ball home, Kelsey Martinez and Christie already had crossed the plate.

"Erica has hit some deep shots for us this year, but they have come and gone," Reyes said. "They were back today though and she's definitely the real deal offensively."

South's ace pitcher Marilyn Montoya concurred with her coach.

"We've known all season that Erica was capable of hitting that way and she had a breakout game (Saturday)," Montoya said.

Montoya was no slouch either. She allowed just four East hits and they were all singles. The senior also fanned three batters in her complete-game effort.

"For the most part, I was happy with the way I pitched and my defense was solid behind me like always," Montoya said.

The loss left East coach Ben Garcia shaking his head.

"As a team, we've struggled at times and we haven't put everything together all season," he said.

"Plus, I give South a lot of credit, they hit the ball well."

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South 203 000 x - 5 5 2

Tapia, Martinez (6) and Ireland; Montoya and Martinez. HR-South: Christie (third, one on).