

Young women from a small Northwest college show the world the meaning of

SPORTSMANSHIP



By Lisa Knight

Sportsmanship. We have all heard the lectures before, and sometimes after, every game. Play fair, don't get upset when you strike out, and high-five the opponent when the game is over. This season, one women's college team took that simple statement and made a story out of it. Actually, it made over 100 stories out of it all over TV, the internet and newspapers across the country.

Western Oregon Senior softball player Sara Tucholsky hit her first homerun of her career on senior day. If that isn't a story in itself, what comes next will make history and future pre-game speeches. Tucholsky was so excited to hit her first out-of-the-park hit she missed first base. Though, the surprise came from her fans, coaches and team that this five-foot-two player hit a homerun they almost didn't seem to notice her miss the bag, until she was laying on the ground.

Tucholsky turned around to touch first-base when her knee gave out, what later was declared from a torn ACL. In excruciating pain, Tucholsky couldn't even push herself to crawl around the field to home plate.

Of course, as rules go, if Tucholsky didn't make it around the diamond, it would be an out. She could be substituted for a pinch runner and have her home run recorded as a two-run single.

At this point, her coach Pam Knox, was worried about her player. She didn't want to touch her and ruin her dream of hitting a home run (by touching her it would cause her to be out), but she didn't want to see Tucholsky put herself through the pain of running the bases. At that solemn moment, opponent Mallory Holtman from Central Washington asked if she could carry Tucholsky around the bases.

At first, Holtman and Tucholsky had one thing in common, they were seniors hanging on to the memories of their last softball days. At the horrific moment when Tucholsky fell to the ground in front of first base, Holtman and Tucholsky struck up a second commonality – they both would be facing knee surgeries in the near future. Holtman understood more than anyone what it meant for Tucholsky to achieve her dream. (Holtman happens to own all offensive records a player could claim at Central Washington). Holtman and Central Washington player Liz Wallace lifted Tucholsky off the ground and carefully escorted her home making sure her left foot tapped each bag.

Holtman said the reason for her good deed was that she hoped someone would do the same for her if the event ever occurred. With a little sincerity and just plain niceness, Holtman created a final game for Tucholsky that she would never forget. If it wasn't for the act of kindness from the Central Washington players they may have won the game. (The final score was 4-2). But it wasn't about the win for either team – it was about the heart that went into the game.