

Pope Fastpitch wins 2017 Region 7-AAAAAA Championship

There were multiple nail biting moments and it took all 3 games of the best of 3 series, but Pope was able to emerge victorious over defending region and defending state champion Cambridge High school to secure the 2017 region softball championship.

Pope found itself in a familiar situation going into the championship series facing the same foe from the 2016 series, but this time Pope had the advantage of playing at their home field, dubbed “*The Racetrack*” on the campus of Pope High School. Going into the series, Pope had put up a perfect 12-0 home field record in 2017 including a victory at home just 2 weeks prior against Cambridge.



Pope was hoping to ride this undefeated momentum to a 2 game sweep of Cambridge, but fate would not have it go that way as Pope was defeated 8-5 in game 1 of the series. With the exception of Leah Higginbotham’s 4th inning homerun, the Pope bats were quiet for much of game 1, and the Hounds entered the final frame down 8-2 where the bats would finally come to life! In the bottom of the 7th the Hounds were able to pound out 5 hits and end the game with the bases loaded and the tying run at the plate and create some momentum for the 1st time in the series.

During game 2, the momentum from the 7th inning of game 1 did not fully materialize as the Hounds quickly went behind 6-2 through 3 innings of play. It took a 6 run 6th inning to put the game away for the Hounds as Cambridge was forced to use 3 pitchers while the Hounds sent 11 batters to the plate in the inning pounding out 8 hits including a 2nd homerun by Leah Higginbotham to lead off the inning and a go ahead home run by Carolyn Deady to take the lead 7-6 enroute to the 12-6 victory. In all, the

Hounds would end game 2 with 16 hits as the Bears were limited to 0 hits over the final 5 innings as Hallie Adams threw 5 innings of no hit relief to take the win. The victory in game 2 would set the stage for a winner take all matchup in game 3.



The Greyhounds lost the “coin flip” prior to the start of the series that determines home and visitor for game 3, so the Greyhounds would be the visiting team and have the 1st chance to score in the game. Hannah Rogers and Gracie Kittrell went to work quickly scoring the Greyhounds 1st run within the games 1st 2 batters as Rogers hit a

leadoff triple and a Kittrell scored Rogers with an RBI ground out. In the bottom of the 1st, reigning state AAAAAA player of the year Taylor Greene, would help Cambridge take the lead back as she hit a 2 run homerun to give the Bears a 2-1 lead and the momentum momentarily. Pope would answer back by chipping away with a run in each of the next 3 innings to stake a 4-2 lead and Hallie Adams took care of the rest scattering 5 hits while striking out 5 enroute to a complete game region championship victory.

As successful as the Pope Fastpitch softball team has been in recent years, making 4 final four appearances in the past 5 years and 2 state championship appearances over the same span, region championships have been elusive as the 2017 championship is only the 2nd region championship in school history! The Hounds only other region championship came in 2012 nestled between region runner up finishes in 2011, 2014 and 2016.

The state playoff appearance in 2017 marks the 8th consecutive years the Hounds have qualified for the state playoffs and the 9th time overall as the 2006 team also qualified for the state playoffs.

Pope will host Winder Barrow in the 1st round of the state playoffs on 10/12 at 5 and 7 with game 3 on 10/14 at noon.

If Pope is able to emerge victorious from the 1st round of the playoffs, finishing as region champion would afford the advantage of being able to host round 2 as well.

The MDJ account of the championship game can be read here:

http://www.mdjonline.com/sports/freshmen-hallie-adams-gracie-kittrell-help-set-tone-in-pope/article_8b6725ea-aa46-11e7-9906-e34f9cd1e4f4.html

Pope road to Columbus can be seen here: <https://www.ghsa.net/2017-2018-ghsa-class-aaaaaa-state-fast-pitch-softball-playoffs-bracket>

