

Canada loses showdown for first place with Japan

Host team draws U.S. in Saturday's semifinals

By Cam Tait, Edmonton Journal August 17, 2012



Team Canada swarms their pitcher, Jessica Berube #14 after they beat Australia in World Cup Women's Baseball action August 12, 2012. *Photograph by: Rick MacWilliam, file, Edmonton Journal*

EDMONTON - Their bats have been almost as hot as the Friday afternoon sun, but the big question was whether the evening air might cool off the Team Canada hitters.

Not this team.

The Canadians added another 15 hits to their totals in the women's baseball World Cup marquee matchup against Japan on Friday night, but it wasn't enough as Canada's perfect record was spoiled by a 9-7 loss to the defending champions.

With the win, Japan (6-1) claims first place in the round-robin portion of the championship and will meet fourth-place Australia (4-3) at 3 p.m. Saturday while Canada (6-1) takes on the United States (5-2) at 7:30 p.m. in the semifinals. Both games are at Telus Field, along with the championship final at 5 p.m. Sunday.

The U.S. was shocked 5-1 by Venezuela in their final round-robin game Friday afternoon at John Fry Park, dropping the Americans into third-place in the eight-team championship instead of being part of a three-way tie for first.

The schedule-makers could not have had a better night to decide the top two teams of the championship.

"We've been focusing on the gold medal ever since we got here," Canada coach Andre Lachance said Friday. "We had a good week, but (Friday) was a good chance to improve and keep the momentum going.

"It's a chance for us to turn up the intensity. I am really happy with our hitting," Lachance said during Friday's pre-game batting practice before the game at Goldstick Park.

Unfortunately, the Canadians, who have looked good all week — especially offensively — struggled to score against Japan in the first four innings.

Hometown girl Nicole Luchanski opened the game with a double down the left field line and later came around to score on Katherine Psota's infield grounder.

Luchanski went three-for-four with two runs scored in the game.

"We've had hits in double figures in all our games," said Lachance.

Well, six of their seven games, anyway. Canada drilled 16 hits against Chinese Taipei, the Netherlands and Cuba, 14 hits against Venezuela, and 12 on the United States.

Canada's least-productive game was against Australia — only four hits but timed well enough to score a 5-4 victory.

The Canadians, who averaged 13.3 hits (93 overall) and 12 runs (84) during round-robin play, rallied for six runs over the final three innings against Japan — including four in the seventh — but it was a case of too little, too late. Their final rally ended with a bases-loaded, one-out double play.

“Our offence has been very good,” said Lechance, who has been with the Canadian women’s team since 2004. “But we to have our best game of the tournament if we wanted to beat Japan.”

Now Canada has to focus on defeating the U.S. again to get a rematch with Japan.

Canada’s wild 15-9 victory over the U.S. earlier this week was particularly enjoyed by Edmonton International Baseball Foundation chair Ron Hayter.

“Going back over the years that our foundation has been in existence, the United States has always been a bee in our bonnet. So knocking off the Americans was long overdue,” said Hayter.

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