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PREP SOFTBALL



WALT MANCINI - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

La Canada pitcher Holly Stoner struck out 10 batters and allowed just four hits on Thursday in a CIF-SS Division 4 playoff game against Rialto, as the Spartans defeated the Knights 8-2.

Stoner leads La Canada in playoff-opening rout

By Aram Tolegian

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LA CANADA » As first post-season starts go, this was about as good as it gets for emerging La Canada High School softball ace Holly Stoner.

The sophomore struck out 10 batters and recorded the first nine Rialto outs via strikeout en route to an 8-2 win over the visiting Knights on Thursday in the first round of the CIF Southern Section Division 4 playoffs.

"Being a sophomore and being able to pitch the first round of CIF, it's such a blessing," Stoner said. "There was pressure but I know my team, if I mess up, can pick me up. So that relieves the pressure."

La Canada won its fifth straight game and improved to 19-6. The Spartans will host highly-rated Buena in Tuesday's second round. Rialto finished 20-9.

The Spartans have taken flight in recent weeks after they turned a close race with Temple City in the Rio Hondo League into a league championship with two dominating wins in the final week of the season. The momentum has clearly carried over to the playoffs.

Stoner, who has allowed just two earned runs in the past six games, is a major reason for it. But the Spartans' bats are making sure their young ace isn't put in too many tough spots.



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Rialto catcher Avacely Morales tries to pick up a low throw to home plate as La Canada's Emily Tinkham scores during the Spartans' 8-2 victory in the first round of the CIF-SS Division 4 playoffs.

On Thursday, senior standout Megan Reilly had the big blast with a two-run home run to go with two singles and a walk.

La Canada led 4-0 before Rialto scored twice (one run was unearned) in the top of the fourth inning to make things interesting. But the Spartans answered right back with three runs in the bottom of the inning.

The big hit in the fourth came from Sammy Jedrey via a two-run double in what turned out to be a three-run outburst to

put La Canada comfortably ahead 7-2 going to the late innings.

"When Megan Reilly got that two-run home run, it just took so much weight off my shoulders," Stoner said. "And then we started getting more line drives, more key hits, and then our runs started going up. Each run that we got, it was pressure."

"When we gave up two runs, we came back with three. We won every inning, and that's how you win the game."

Freshman leadoff hitter Emily Tinkham got in

on the fun for La Canada by collecting three hits, including a double.

La Canada has scored 50 runs in its last five games. The Spartans will need to keep things going against No. 3 seed Buena on Tuesday in order to advance.

"We're excited to be at home and not traveling," La Canada head coach Chuck Gunter said. "This group is so relaxed. You see them goofing around when they're at home. It makes it easier. We need this edge to be playing at home against this team."