

Another 'special' showing

Ritter throws the first postseason no-hitter in Michigan history

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Just give the record book to Jennie Ritter.

She clearly isn't done writing her own story.

The University of Michigan senior pitcher penned yet another glorious chapter in her maize and blue career by throwing the first no-hitter in Michigan postseason history as the Wolverines opened the 2006 NCAA Tournament with a 4-0 victory over Youngstown State on Friday night at Alumni Field.

The Dexter High School graduate allowed one base runner - a one-out walk in the first inning - and struck out 15 while facing the minimum. It was Ritter's fifth collegiate no-hitter, moving her into first place in the Michigan annals all by herself.

"Jennie Ritter is special," Michigan coach Carol Hutchins said. "She's a special kid, a special pitcher. She's one of the very best in the country."

Michigan (41-13) will play Oklahoma - a 1-0 victory over Kent State - at noon today. The game can be seen live on ESPN2.

Ritter had trouble locating Winn Garret's strike zone early as she worked two-ball counts to the first two Penguin hitters. Tiffany Patteson led off the game with a hard-hit groundball to second baseman Tiffany Haas, and Ritter walked Becky Hibner on the eighth pitch of the at-bat.

Catcher Becky Marx made sure Ritter would only face three batters in the inning when she threw out Hibner trying to steal second base.

Ritter struck out seven in a row through the third inning and never allowed a ball to reach the outfield grass.

Third baseman Grace Leutele caught a sixth-inning line drive, Haas fielded two ground balls, and first baseman Samantha Findlay fielded one ground ball through the sixth inning. Shortstop Teddi Ewing scooped up the final batted ball several paces behind the pitcher's circle and recorded the last out with a sharp throw to Findlay.

"I just needed to go out there and do my job with my defense behind me," said Ritter, who threw 70 of her 96 pitches for strikes. "If you want to throw a no-hitter you can't think about it. I was thinking about throwing good pitches. I felt really good today."

Sophomore center fielder Alessandra Giampaolo also felt good. She socked her first home run over the fence in right center field in the second inning for Michigan's first run. She added a double in the fifth that scored pinch runner Michelle Weatherdon from second. Findlay scored when the center fielder overran the ball at the warning track. Giampaolo, who hit a home run on the first pitch of her collegiate career last season, said it has been awhile since she's been able to find a groove this year.

"This is a good time to kick it into gear," she said. "I haven't been swinging the bat as well as I did last year, but its feeling a little better now."

The Wolverines have won eight straight games and appear to have completely recovered from an early season struggle. They are two victories away from a regional title - the first step in winning a second-straight national title.

"How we've played the last two weeks is as good as I can hope for," Hutchins said. "They've found their passion again. They've been enthused. I'm excited for them."

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