



# Behind the Scenes

Every athlete has a place they call home, whether that be a football field or a gym floor. For these girls, it's the dugout.

Picture this: fans are sporting their team's colors while cheering on their home team. The pitcher blocks the sun from glaring into her eyes with a gloved hand and lines up the pitch. No matter the size of the crowd, it seems all conversations stop as the ball is thrown to the batter. As soon as the bat makes contact, hitting its target and blowing the yellow ball across the field, that's when the magic happens. But what all goes into play behind the scenes to prepare that batter, that pitcher, and all the others on the field? What really happens on the sidelines when the crowd isn't focused on the action on the field?

For one, softball requires a lot of rigorous practice sessions during the week, and this is when many friendships are made between players. This is where traditions are born.

"We talked about relationships and a

lot about our stressful problems so that they don't affect the team in a negative way. We all share our thoughts, good or bad, so that we can trust [each other] on and off the field. We usually do a prayer at the beginning of games. I usually just pull people aside and tell them that they're my idol to make them smile, to pump them up, and to make them feel they can become so much more after high school," said Audie Earnest (11).

A lot happens inside of the dugout, where players are gathered in a group, that spectators are unaware of.

"I bonded with so many people [in the dugout]! It was intimidating at first, but everyone was so sweet. I got to know so many new people, and most of my closest friends on the team are from other schools! [Often], Brock was giving us pep-talks and Carl [was] making us

laugh. The coaches are a big part of the dugout pep-talks," said Allison Michalski (10).

The coaches on the softball team definitely played a large part in not only coaching the team, but also guiding the team in the way it should go.

"I'm pretty close with all my coaches. Honestly, they are more like our parents during the season. Like, if there's a party, they forbid us to go. If there is something wrong [on the team], they bring us together to have a family meeting," said Earnest.

The team was not only able to work together as a whole, but they also broke down into individual groups. This helped to better not only the players but also benefit the coaches as well by teaching them how to help the team.

"We [coaches and athletes] work one-on-one to improve and benefit one

another in games and practices by doing drills, plays, and runs," said Layre Sickler (10).

Teamwork isn't the only important factor. Making sure the team is properly motivated seems like a big part of getting the win.

"[We had] a positive attitude, and while we're at practice, in order to stay motivated, we focused on one common goal," said Michalski (10).

The Grand Island Crusaders had a 27-8 season, placing runner-up at the Class B-5 District Championship. They earned an overall state ranking of 35th place.

"I loved playing softball [this past couple of years] because I get to play the sport that I love with some of my closest friends. It has been one of my best life experiences," said Lily Wotaszewski (12).



## What is the goofiest MOMENT OF THE SEASON?



"[The goofiest moments of the season are] probably just us acting us," said Layre Sickler (10).



"I hit a line drive during practice and hit Coach Collier in the knee. It was swollen and bruised so he had to ice it for a couple of weeks," said Audie Earnest (11).



"Honestly, so many funny things happened, and I couldn't just pick one. It's another reason Crusaders is so fun to be apart of," said Allison Michalski (10).

**GOOD LUCK!** At the beginning of the game against Centura/Central Valley during the starting line up, Cyndee Hinstable (10) runs through the tunnel created by her teammates. Unfortunately, the Crusaders lost the B-5 District Championship game to Centura/Central Valley. The score was 6-1.

**OUT!** Stepping on her base, Audie Earnest (11) foils a Holdrege-Chase player's plan to retreat back to first base. This is Earnest's third year playing softball for the Crusaders, and she has participated since Wood River added this program.



**AIMING SHORT** Anticipating to run for first base, Lily Wotaszewski (12) bunts her way to the base. With great luck, the team ended up winning the game with a score of 9-0 against Aurora.

Wotaszewski has been a part of the softball team since Wood River co-oped with the Crusaders.

**FIRST TIMER** With a steady arm, Allison Michalski (10) pitches the ball to the ready batter. This was not only Michalski's first year at Wood River but also her first year pitching varsity softball for the Grand Island Crusaders. Michalski has been playing softball since tee-ball.

**PREP TIME** To get ready for the next inning, Percy Craft (9) helps warm up one of her teammates. Although she did not play varsity throughout the entire season, Craft (9) was a helpful assistant.



## TOP FIVE Softball Practice Drills

- 1 Hitting Heavy-Weight Balls
- 2 Live Hitting with Pitchers
- 3 Sliding & Running Bases
- 4 Bunting
- 5 Infield Grounders

