

2000 IHSAA Class 3A Softball State Finals

June 17, 2000

Portage wins first softball state title

Michele Pickering's sixth-inning double broke a 0-0 tie and propelled Portage to a 2-0 victory over top-ranked Decatur Central at Cherry Tree Softball Complex in Carmel. It was the first softball state championship for the Indians (30-4), who celebrated their 26th consecutive victory.

Decatur Central (34-2) finished as the Class 3A state runner-up for the second straight year.

Portage loaded the bases with one out in the top of the sixth on a walk and two infield singles. Pickering delivered a booming double over the centerfielder's head to bring home Belinda Meyers and Corinne Munoz.

Decatur Central's biggest threat came in the bottom of the fifth inning. Jill Nihiser doubled off the leftfield fence to open the inning and moved to third on a sacrifice bunt. But Portage dials quelled the threat with two infield outs.

The title was the seventh IHSAA title for Portage and the second this school year. The Indians own four boys cross country crowns, including the 1999 title. They also captured the Class 3A football championship in 1977 and the girls gymnastics title in 1975.

Decatur Central's Mary Blessing

Named Mental Attitude Award Recipient

Mary Blessing, Decatur Central's outstanding senior pitcher was named the 2000 recipient of the Class 3A Mental Attitude Award by the IHSAA Executive Committee.

The state's career strikeout leader helped the Hawks to four straight sectional titles and two consecutive Class 3A state runner-up finishes. Blessing struck out 17 batters in a 4-0 semifinals victory over Fort Wayne Northrop and followed with six against Portage.

Also a standout in basketball, Blessing has signed a basketball letter of intent at the University of Toledo. Academically, she ranked in the top third of her senior class.

Farm Bureau Insurance, corporate partner of the IHSAA, presented a check for \$1,000 to Decatur Central High School in Blessing's name.

Portage (2)	AB	R	H	RBI
Corinne Munoz, cf	3	1	1	0
Tracy Kobar, ss	3	0	1	0
Michele Pickering, 2b	3	0	1	2
Ashley Safstrom, 1b	3	0	1	0
Cheryl Buerger, 3b	2	0	0	0
Jamie Sutton, dh	3	0	0	0
Jamie Lewis, rf	2	0	0	0
Becky Rodriguez, c	1	0	0	0
Belinda Meyers, pr	0	1	0	0
Tina Chase, lf	2	0	0	0
Anni Bartok, p	0	0	0	0
Totals	22	2	4	2

Decatur Central (0)	AB	R	H	RBI
Amanda Huffer, ss	3	0	0	0
Lisa Shipley, cf	3	0	1	0
Sara Laugle, 1b	3	0	2	0
Desiree Parsley, 3b	3	0	0	0
Mary Blessing, p	3	0	0	0
Brittany Park, c	3	0	1	0
Shanan Abney, 2b	3	0	1	0
Jill Nihiser, rf	3	0	1	0
Dasee Staton, dh	1	0	0	0
Melissa Baker, ph	1	0	0	0
Ashleigh Allen, lf	0	0	0	0

Totals	26	0	6	0
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Decatur Central	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	--	0	6	0
Portage	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	--	2	4	0

E -- NONE. **LOB** -- Portage 1, Decatur Central 5. **2B** -- Pickering, Nihiser. **DP** -- NONE. **SAC** -- Buergler, Staton. **SB** -- NONE. **Umpires** -- Steven Chamness (home plate), Stephen Morris

(first base), Kerry O'Brien (third base). **Time** -- 1:45. **Attendance** -- N/A.

Pitching Summary	IP	R	ER	H	BB	SO
Anni Bartok, Portage (W, 9-1)	7.0	0	0	6	0	0
Mary Blessing, Decatur C. (L, 26-2)	7.0	2	2	4	1	6

Semifinals

Decatur Central advanced to the Class 3A state championship game for the second straight year with a 4-0 victory over Fort Wayne Northrop. Senior pitcher Mary Blessing (26-1), the state's career strikeout leader, whiffed 17 Fort Wayne Northrop batters while tossing a two-hitter. She took a perfect game into the fourth inning.

Jill Nihiser of Decatur Central lashed a two-run double to leftfield in the fifth to break open a pitcher's dual between Blessing and Amy Kendall. Nihiser's hit scored Brittany Park and Shanan Abney to give the Hawks all the runs they would need. Nihiser later scored on an infield ground ball.

Decatur Central lost to Penn 1-0 in 15 innings in the 1999 Class 3A state championship game.

Eighth-ranked Portage survived three bases-loaded opportunities by Boonville to move into the championship game with a 5-3 triumph in eight innings in the first semifinals game.

Portage (29-4) scored in the top of the first inning and never trailed Boonville (30-2) but it was a battle all the way. Boonville scored in the bottom of the seventh to force extra innings.

Portage tallied the go-ahead run in top of the eighth when Cheryl Buergler banged her third hit and second RBI. Michele Pickering scored on Buergler's double to centerfield, and Buergler scored the final run on a fielder's choice.

Boonville loaded the bases with two outs in the bottom of the eight on two walks and a bunt single by Hayes. But for the third time, the Pioneers failed to convert. Boonville collected 11 hits but stranded 11 runners.

Game 1

Portage (29-4)	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	--	5	7	2
Boonville (30-2)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	--	3	11	5

Game 2

Decatur Central (33-1)	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	--	4	10	0
Fort Wayne Northrop (28-7)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	--	0	2	0