

US RALLIES IN EIGHTH FOR WIN OVER JAPAN

Aug. 16, 2004, 10:38 a.m. (ET)

Athens, GREECE – First-time Olympian Cat Osterman (Houston, TX) looked as though she were a veteran in the circle on Monday afternoon as she led the U.S. to a 3-0 extra inning victory against arch rival Japan. Scoreless through regulation seven innings, the pitcher's duel between Osterman and Japan veteran Yuri Takayama was a classic before the bats of the U.S. finally came around in the top of the eighth to improve to 3-0.

"Today was very exciting for our team," Osterman said. "It was good to be able to pitch 2/3 of an inning in our opening game versus Italy. It allowed me to get some of the first game jitters out of the way so I could relax and pitch my game today."

A rematch of the 2000 gold medal game, this marked the first time in the last six outings that the game was decided by more than one run and the fourth time the game had been decided in extra innings.

Osterman was fearless in the circle during regulation totaling 11 strikeouts and allowing just one hit and one walk. Japan's Takayama was equally impressive using her defense to hold the U.S. hitless through seven innings.

With chants of 'USA' echoing throughout the stadium the tides changed as the international tie breaker rule was put into effect in the top of the eighth. This rule allows the last batter out from the previous inning to be placed on second base. Pinch- runner Amanda Freed (Cypress, CA) entered for the U.S. at second base before a successful sacrifice bunt from Stacey Nuveman (La Verne, CA) placed Freed at third with one out. An incredible at-bat that included 17 pitches, Lovieanne Jung (Fountain Valley, CA) battled Takayama before being issued a walk to put runners on the corners. Jung's at-bat was actually extended when Japan third baseman Reika Utsugi failed to make a routine play on a foul ball due to the bright sunlight.

Coming through in the clutch, Kelly Kretschman (Indian Harbour Beach, FL), who was an alternate on the 2000 Olympic team, drove a sacrifice fly to centerfield to plate Freed and give the U.S. the run it needed. With the momentum in its favor, the U.S. added two insurance runs for the eventual 3-0 win.

Jessica Mendoza (Camarillo, CA) stepped up with a base hit up the middle before Jenny Topping (Whittier, CA) was called up as a pinch-hitter. In her first at-bat in Olympic competition, she responded like a veteran driving her second pitch to right field for a base hit before a fielding error from Japanese right fielder Yumi Iwabuchi scored Jung for the 2-0 advantage.

"I have to admit I was a little nervous," Topping said. "But I knew my job was to put the ball in play. I really thought they would throw me to the inside but I relaxed and just made contact."

Lead-off Natasha Watley (Irvine, CA), batting .600 in the Games, beat out an infield RBI single to score Mendoza to secure the 3-0 U.S. victory.

The U.S. remains as the only unbeaten in Olympic competition has completed three

games without allowing a run. The win extends the U.S. wins streak to 73 games in which it has outscored its opposition 621-17.

Continuing round-robin play, the U.S. will continue its journey towards a third gold medal on Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. (Athens time) when it takes the field against 1996 silver medalists China.

YOU HAVE MAIL-The USA Softball Women's team is receiving over 100 emails a day from fans all over the world. The team has been posting the emails on the walls of their apartment in the village as inspiration.

About ASA

The Amateur Softball Association, founded in 1933, is the National Governing Body of softball in the United States and a member of the United States Olympic Committee. The ASA has become one of the nation's largest sports organizations and now sanctions competition in every state through a network of 91 local associations. The ASA has grown from a few hundred teams in the early days to over 240,000 teams and 40,000 umpires today, representing a membership of more than three million. For more information on the ASA, visit www.asasoftball.com

About USA Softball

USA Softball is the brand created, operated and owned by the ASA that links the USA Men's, Women's, Junior Boys' and Junior Girls' National Team programs together. USA Softball is responsible for training, equipping and promoting these four National Teams to compete in international and domestic competitions. The USA Softball Women's National Team is one of the only two women's sports involved in the Olympic movement to capture back-to-back gold medals at the Olympic Games since 1996. The U.S. women have also won seven World Championship titles including the last five consecutive.

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