

USA CAPTURES TOP SEED IN MEDAL ROUND

Aug. 20, 2004, 10:31 a.m. (ET)

Athens, GREECE --- A perfect 7-0, the USA Softball team captured a 3-0 win over World bronze medalist Chinese Taipei on Friday to complete round-robin play and enter as the No. 1 seed in playoff action. South paw Cat Osterman (Houston, TX) recorded her second win in Olympic competition tossing six complete innings with 10 strikeouts and allowing just one hit. Outscoring opponents 41-0 in seven games, the victory moves Team USA into playoff action where they will battle arch rival and No. 2 seed Australia on Sunday at 12 noon (Athens time).

"It's not how you start, its how you finish," said U.S. veteran Lisa Fernandez. "This team has played really well this week but now it's a whole new ballgame. The slate is wiped clean and we start over from here and must be ready to play our best game on Sunday."

The U.S. saw its first bases loaded defensive situation in the top of the fourth when a walk, error, walk situation unfolded. But Osterman rebounded in style silencing the threat with a strikeout.

Scoreless through three innings, the power swing of Crystl Bustos (Canyon Country, CA) changed the momentum for Team USA. With one swing of the bat she belted her third solo home run to deep centerfield to give the home team a 1-0 lead.

Amanda Freed (Cypress, CA) connected on her first hit of the Games in the bottom of the fifth as she led the inning with a double over the second baseman. Followed by an infield base hit from Natasha Watley (Irvine, CA), whose 7 of 9 hits have been infield hits, Freed advanced to third with Watley stealing second putting two runners in scoring position. A sacrifice fly to left field from Jessica Mendoza (Camarillo, CA) scored Freed for the 2-0 advantage.

Riding a no-hitter, Taipei's F. Chen broke loose the lone Taipei hit of the game in the top of the sixth inning. But Osterman and crew remained in charge quickly ending the inning and leaving Chen stranded at first.

The bat of right-fielder Kelly Kretschman (Indian Harbour Springs, FL) added an insurance run in the sixth with a triple to centerfield plating Lovieanne Jung (Fountain Valley, CA) who early reached on a base hit.

The play of the game came in the seventh inning after a lead-off single to Tung. Freed made a diving catch in center to retire H. Yang and then throw a bullet to first to double off Tung.

"The reason no one has scored on us is because of the amazing defense we have behind us," said Fernandez. "Amanda's catch, was amazing. The fact that she came up with the double play was even better."

The U.S. has been tremendous on both sides of the field holding opponents to a .080 batting average while leading the charts with a team average of .436. Fernandez, who batted a dismal .090 in the 2000 Games, entered the Olympic record books finishing round-robin play with a .556 average. Close behind is lead-off hitter Watley at .409 with

four RBI and 5-of-6 stolen bases.

“It is important that we continue to do the little things that got us here,” said head coach Mike Candrea. “We have a good mix of our short game and will hopefully get the timely hit in the big game.”

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