

Warming up  
Written by Bob Brownne / Tracy Press  
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**All-American Sports Academy's A team is preparing for the 12U softball nationals.**



Nicole Kaiser fires the ball to first base during a drill at Monday's practice. The team is conditioning for a national tournament in Alabama in a few weeks. Photo by Bob Brownne/Tracy Press

The five-game sweep of the recent 2008 NorCal State 12-and-under A division tournament was just a warmup for the girls from All-American Sports Academy.

At the end of the month, they will head to the Amateur Softball Association and USA Softball's National Championship, July 27 through Aug. 3, in Montgomery, Ala.

All-American qualified for nationals with a win in the Greater San Joaquin Association's 12-and-under Junior Olympic Championship in Stockton last month. Their four 10-run-rule wins in five games during the state tournament over the Fourth of July weekend confirmed that they're ready for the ASA's big event.

"You know when you're going to get there you're playing quality competitive teams, and you know you're playing to say you're the best," manager Lamont Richardson said.

The other teams in the Montgomery tournament also had to win regional tournaments to earn a spot in the competition.

Now that they have qualified, the girls are spending their time on the practice field and in the batting cages at All-American's Larch Road gym.

It's Patty Kaiser's job to make sure the girls are in shape for the weekend-long tournaments. As the team's strength and conditioning trainer, she runs the girls through sprints and agility exercises before the usual fielding and throwing practice.

"They play a lot of games in a row. The more endurance they have, the better they're going to perform," Kaiser said, adding that tournaments could include three or four games on a Sunday for the winning teams.

She said the workouts and improvements in strengths and endurance in the past six months have made a big difference. It shows on hot Sunday afternoons, when fatigue is the difference between the championship and second place.

“We’ve won our last four tournaments, so we’ve gone six or seven games on a weekend,” she said.

Richardson said the team plays in a tournament about every other week, which adds up to about 75 games this year, plus an assortment of friendly games in between tournaments.

From the start, the team has aimed for the ASA national tournament in Alabama. Richardson said the key is putting the team up against the toughest competition around.

“You have to play in better tournaments to show your players what they’ll see in nationals,” he said.

He added that the team has been to state competitions the past three years, and some players have seen national competition.

“We were there as 10s, and this group here will be the first to go as 12s,” Richardson said.

All-American sent its 10-and-under team to the national championship in Moline, Ill., two years ago and finished in fifth place.

“There were 52 teams there, so to come in fifth was awesome,” he said.