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## **Opponents carry injured hitter around the bases to ensure her first-ever home run**

**Central Washington players help a Western Oregon rival, hurt rounding the bases, to touch 'em all**

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Gary Frederick thought he had seen everything in 40 years at Central Washington University. He'd coached baseball and women's basketball for 11 years, been an assistant on the football team for 17 and athletic director for 18.

Last weekend, he learned he was wrong.

In the top of the second inning as his Wildcats played host to Western Oregon University in Ellensburg, Wash., something happened that spoke to the beauty of athletics. It came in the form of a home run that no one in attendance will forget.

"Never in my life had I seen anything like it," said Frederick, 70, in his 14th season as softball coach.

"It was just unbelievable."

Central entered Saturday's doubleheader one game behind Western Oregon in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference race. At stake was a bid to the NCAA's Division II playoffs. Western won the first game 8-1, extending its winning streak to 10 games. Central desperately needed the second game to keep its postseason hopes alive.

Western Oregon's 5-foot-2-inch right fielder came up to bat with two runners on base in the second inning. Sara Tucholsky's game was off to a rough start. A group of about eight guys sitting behind the right field fence had been heckling her.

"They were giving me a pretty hard time," said Tucholsky, a Forest Grove High School graduate. "They were just being boys, trying to get in my head."

At the plate, Tucholsky concentrated on ignoring the wise guys. She took strike one. And then the senior did something she had never done before -- even in batting practice. The career .153 hitter smashed the next pitch

over the center field fence for an apparent three-run home run.

The exuberant former high school point guard sprinted to first. As she reached the bag, she looked up to watch the ball clear the fence and missed first base. Six feet past the bag, she stopped abruptly to return and touch it. But something gave in her right knee; she collapsed on the base path.

"I was in a lot of pain," she told The Oregonian on Tuesday. "Our first-base coach was telling me I had to crawl back to first base. 'I can't touch you,' she said, 'or you'll be out. I can't help you.' "

Tucholsky, to the horror of teammates and spectators, crawled through the dirt and the pain back to first.

Western coach Pam Knox rushed onto the field and talked to the umpires near the pitcher's mound. The umpires said Knox could place a substitute runner at first. Tucholsky would be credited with a single and two RBIs, but her home run would be erased.

"The umpires said a player cannot be assisted by their team around the bases," Knox said. "But it is her only home run in four years. She is going to kill me if we sub and take it away. But at same time I was concerned for her. I didn't know what to do. . . .

"That is when Mallory stepped in."

Mallory Holtman is the greatest softball player in Central Washington history. Normally when the conference's all-time home run leader steps up to the plate, Pam Knox and other conference coaches grimace.

But on senior day, the first baseman volunteered a simple, selfless solution to her opponents' dilemma: What if the Central Washington players carried Tucholsky around the bases?

The umpires said nothing in the rule book precluded help from the opposition. Holtman asked her teammate junior shortstop and honors program student Liz Wallace of Florence, Mont., to lend a hand. The teammates walked over and picked up Tucholsky and resumed the home-run walk, pausing at each base to allow Tucholsky to touch the bag with her uninjured leg.

"We started laughing when we touched second base," Holtman said. "I said, 'I wonder what this must look like to other people.' "

Holtman got her answer when they arrived at home plate. She looked up and saw the entire Western Oregon team in tears.

"My whole team was crying," Tucholsky said. "Everybody in the stands was crying. My coach was crying. It touched a lot of people."

Even the hecklers in right field quieted for a half-inning before resuming their tirade at the outfielder who replaced Tucholsky.

Western Oregon won the game 4-2 and extinguished Central Washington's playoff hopes.

Afterward, Central coach Frederick said he received a clarification from the umpiring supervisor, who said NCAA rules allow a substitute to run for a player who is injured after a home run. The clarification, however, could not diminish the glory of Holtman's and Wallace's gesture. Holtman downplayed her role, which her coach said is

typical of the White Salmon, Wash. native.

"In the end, it is not about winning and losing so much," Holtman said. "It was about this girl. She hit it over the fence and was in pain and she deserved a home run. . . .

"This is a huge experience I will take away. We are not going to remember if we won or lost, we are going to remember this kind of stuff that shows the character of our team. It is the best group of girls I've played with. I came up with the idea, but any girl on the team would have done it."

Tucholsky went to the doctor Tuesday. Her knee was still swollen; her trainer suspects she tore her anterior cruciate ligament. She will be in the dugout this weekend when Western Oregon attempts to cement an NCAA berth with games against Seattle and Western Washington.

Tucholsky will graduate this spring as a business major with a minor in health. She plans to continue her studies at Portland State and pursue a career in the health field. But she will never forget the generosity of her opponents in her final collegiate game.

"Those girls did something awesome to help me get my first home run," she said. "It makes you look at athletes in a different way. It is not always all about winning but rather helping someone in a situation like that."

Holtman knows something of knee injuries. On May 8, she is scheduled to have arthroscopic surgery on both knees, which have pained her all season. On June 7, she will graduate with a degree in business. She intends to study sports administration in graduate school at Central Washington.

Holtman believes sports has made her a better person.

She wants to give back.

Mallory Holtman plans to do that by becoming a coach.

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