

SPORTS

‘Veintiuno!’*Walker’s 21-strikeout no-hitter makes waves at Episcopal*

BY AUSTIN DANFORTH

When she woke up on March 30, Episcopal’s Nancy Walker figured that day’s softball game would be called off. She had no need for her sacred game-day rituals. The afternoon matchup with Holy Child would surely not happen, she thought.

By noon, though, the skies opened up and the word got out. Game on.

“At first, I was kind of freaked out because I’m usually very religious about everything,” Walker said. “Go to bed at this time on game night, wake up at this time, have this to eat ... it’s all very in-place.”

Luckily for the Maroon, that didn’t matter.

Walker, the team’s ace and co-captain, shut down Holy Child with a 21-strikeout no-hitter. Despite a walk, a hit batter and several fielding errors, her performance was enough to lead Episcopal to a 4-2 win, its first of the year.

It was Walker’s fifth no-hitter in three years as Episcopal’s starting pitcher, but the 21-strikeout outing, a school record, was an entirely new experience — and totally unexpected — for the junior hurler.

“I was expecting it to be a pretty rough game because I wasn’t feeling prepared, I hadn’t done my usual routine,” Walker said.

“I was not at all ‘in the zone’ earlier that day. I don’t know if that ended up working in my favor or what — maybe that should be a new routine for me,” she said.

A day later, news of her record outing had spread across campus — in more than one language. When she stopped by the Spanish classroom that morning to drop off a paper, the teacher immediately changed the subject and caught Walker off guard with a “21” chant.

“I’m in AP Spanish and I didn’t know what she was talking about except she kept saying, ‘Veintiuno! Veintiuno!’” Walker said. “It’s a pretty small



PHOTO/ELIZABETH WATTS

Nancy Walker, above, broke a school record with 21 strike outs last week.

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— Catcher
Lallie Lukens

community so everybody gets really excited for each other. The support was just awesome.”

The proliferation of K’s in the scorebook was unlike anything Episcopal coach Suzy Willemsen had seen before.

“We knew we were getting close,” Willemsen said. “But our main thing was wanting to get that first win. That was the big cherry on top, her having such a dominating experience.”

Walker called the feat a “once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing,” but it didn’t come out of thin air. As a freshman, she struck out 162 batters in 107 innings of work, amassing a 10-8 record with a 1.11 ERA.

Now a little more than half-way through her high school career, she has notched 346 strikeouts for the Maroon (1-3 through last Tuesday). However, this year has presented a new challenge. Four of Walker’s teammates are getting a varsity-level introduction to the sport with little experience.

Her catcher, junior Lallie Lukens, picked up the game last year and played third base. Moving behind the plate was intimidating, she said, but by all accounts she is learning fast — fast enough to catch a no-hitter in only her third start.

Like her teammates, Lukens said she tries to follow Walker’s lead.

“She surprises us every game with how amazing she pitches,” Lukens said. “It’s hard for her because we expect so much of her, but every game she meets our expectations and exceeds them.”

As green as the Maroon were to start the year, Walker said she felt an added weight to pitch her best going into each of the team’s first two games — both lopsided losses.

The disappearance of that anxiety happened to



PHOTO/ELIZABETH WATTS

Episcopal’s ace and co-captain Nancy Walker, above, winds up and delivers a pitch a day after her career performance.

SPORTS SHORTS

First a trick, then treats for Aces

Alexandria lost the Aces, its collegiate summer league baseball team — for a day, anyway.

On April 1, the club sent out a note to all email subscribers that, because of “the development of a great situation” the team became the “Arlington Aces.” April fools.

The team remains in Alexandria and on June 3, the night before opening day for the team, the organization will hold a “Meet the Aces Night” at the Dairy Godmother in Del Ray.

T.C. baseball to hold annual Hit-A-Thon Saturday

This Saturday, the T.C. Williams varsity and junior varsity baseball teams will be holding their annual fundraising Baseball Hit-A-Thon from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Simpson Field on Monroe Avenue. There will be food, prizes and T.C. baseball gear.

City cheerleading invitational this Saturday

The Alexandria Department of

Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities is hosting its first-ever invitational cheerleading competition this Saturday at T.C. Williams High School. The competition, getting underway at 11 a.m., features teams from Charles Barrett, Charles Houston, Cora Kelly, Mount Vernon, Nannie J. Lee, Patrick Henry and William Ramsay recreation centers and teams from around the D.C. area to spice up the competition and sample the talent throughout the area, according to event organizers.

Tickets are on sale in advance at neighborhood recreation centers and at the Recreation Services office through 5 p.m. on April 8. Advance tickets are \$5 for ages 13 years and up, youth tickets are \$2 and children under five are free. Day-of ticket prices increase by \$1.

Panthers host youth football camps through June

Each Saturday afternoon through June 5, the Virginia Panthers youth football club will hold free two-hour mini-camps for

boys and girls ages 5 to 15. From 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. per session at the Quander Road School, the Panthers coaching staff teaches young athletes that working hard in the off-season better prepares them for the regular season. For more information on the conditioning camps, contact Michael Henderson (571-345-5065), Kevin Chapman (301-433-2133) or Vondell Jackson (202-787-9474).

— Austin Danforth

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coincide with the Holy Child game and it has yet to return. She threw a two-hitter in a loss to powerful Georgetown Visitation the next day.

“She was trying to carry the whole team and you can’t do that,” Willemsen said. “When she just focused on what she can do on the mound and not what’s going on behind her, it

was great.”

Considering her teammates’ development, Walker said the 21-strikeout game was also tinged with a little bit of guilt.

“It would be awesome if it happened again, but I wouldn’t be disappointed if every game from here on out didn’t end with 21 strikeouts,” Walker said. “If every game was a 21-strikeout no-hitter, that wouldn’t be a lot of fun for anyone else on the Episcopal softball team.”

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AROUND THE BASES



A spring break trip to Florida for the **T.C. WILLIAMS** baseball team was just the tonic the Titans needed. Entering on the heels of a 10-4 loss to district foe W.T. Woodson, T.C. started with another loss but came home with two straight wins.

On Monday, the Titans (4-2) made it three in a row with an 11-6 home win against Liberty (Md.). They faced Lee Wednesday night and continue their Patriot District schedule with games against West Springfield (Friday) and South County (Tuesday).



After kicking off their season with a win against city rivals Bishop Ireton, **ST. STEPHEN'S / ST. AGNES** has slumped to four straight losses. Last week, St. Stephen's (1-4) dropped games against West Potomac, Flint Hill and Paul VI, each by 10 or more runs. The Saints host Bullis today at 4:30 p.m.

It took a couple of weeks, but



young **BISHOP IRETON** finally broke through into the win column on Saturday with a 4-2 win against West Potomac. Life had been rough before that, though, with eight straight losses to begin the season — including two one-run defeats. Ireton's winning ways were short-lived, as they dropped Tuesday's game 9-7 against Potomac. The Cardinals (1-8) travel to St. Mary's Ryken this Saturday for a 1 p.m. game.



Going into Tuesday afternoon, **EPISCOPAL** was the only Alexandria school other than T.C. to have a record above .500. The Maroon's 7-6 win on April 1 against Mt. Vernon moved them to 3-2 on the season, buoyed by George Reefer's first win of the season. They hit the heart of their IAC schedule this week with games against Georgetown Prep (Thursday) and St. Stephen's (Tuesday).

— Austin Danforth