

SIUE softball splits pair, defeats Niagara 3-1, falls to No. 4 Alabama 6-4

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HONOLULU – SIUE softball split a pair of games Wednesday, defeating Niagara 3-1 and dropping a 6-4 decision to No. 4 Alabama.

The Cougars stand 8-8 after two nail-biting games at the Rainbow Wahine Classic.

SIUE opened the day against the Tide, taking a 3-1 lead in the fourth inning behind a two-run single by Zoe Schafer and an RBI single by Kalei Kaneshiro.

Alabama, which remained the lone team in the country at 26-0, needed three pitchers to dispatch the Cougars.

SIUE put Alabama pitchers on the defensive but left a season-high 12 runners on base. Sarah Cornell picked up the win for the Tide by closing out the fourth inning and is now 10-0. Montana Fouts hurled the final three innings and earned her second save.

"We had multiple chances to pull through but couldn't get the big hit," said SIUE Interim Head Coach Jessica Jones.

Alyssa Heren, who is hitting .490 through 16 games and has continued to make top-level plays in the outfield, agreed with Jones.

"I think coach is happy that we're getting on and getting hits, but we're just not getting the timely hits we need," she said.

Jones said Heren put in the work to get to where she is.

"Her speed gives her so many options at the plate," said Jones. "She can hit for contact. She can hit for power."

After Alabama pulled ahead with a three-run rally in the fifth and two more runs in the sixth, the Cougars made a last-ditch effort in the bottom of the seventh. Micah Arps was credited with an RBI in the inning on a fielder's choice but the Cougars left two runners on base.

Corrina Rivas took the loss in relief of Emily Ingles.

In Wednesday's second game, Ingles and Rivas once again combined with a better result this time, holding Niagara to seven hits. Ingles would improve to 5-3 while Rivas threw the final 2 1/3 innings for her second save.

"It's great to have the confidence to have them pitch as a staff," said Jones.

SIUE jumped on the scoreboard first with a single tally in the fourth. SIUE's Jill Niehaus scored on a wild pitch by Niagara starter-loser Sierra Bertrand.

Kaneshiro made it 2-0 Cougars in the fifth, delivering a RBI single up the middle that drove home Heren.

Rachel Funk helped Niagara, 0-8, avoid the shutout in the sixth with her first home run of the season.

SIUE added an insurance run in the seventh as Conner Cutright singled home Arps.

Two more games are scheduled for Thursday with slightly different times. SIUE faces No. 4 Alabama at 8:30 p.m. CT followed by a 10 p.m. CT matchup against Hawaii. The Cougars play Niagara once more