Coach Joe Coenen, gathered in the outfield with his Chanhassen team following the Class 4A State Softball title game, asked sophomore Carly Dammann, “Two months ago, could you have pictured yourself playing second base in the state championship game?”

The answer was never. No way.

But there was Dammann at second base, and sophomore Brooke Miller at shortstop, for the most pivotal outs in school history. Two girls who had played maybe a dozen or so innings in the field this season.

It was only fitting that it took a team effort from Chanhassen, which ended every practice with “One Team,” to capture the school’s first state championship in a 5-3 win over Buffalo June 10 at Caswell Park in North Mankato.

“Jess (Bren) would say ‘one,’ everyone else would say ‘team.’ We preached all year long that you never know when that opportunity is going to come. We believed that. There’s a reason why we practice our varsity and JV together. We talk to the girls on the bench about if that opportunity comes, you have to be ready,” the Chanhassen coach said.

The seven innings spanned more than 6 1 /2 hours, a storm, ironically, rolling through the complex in the fourth inning, forcing teams to a nearby middle school for more than three hours.

The delay also caused the loss from the line-up of two of Chanhassen’s top players in third baseman Kali O’Keeffe, who was leaving for a mission trip to Africa, and Taylor Manno, the team’s starting pitcher, 6-0 in the post-season on the rubber.

Before the restart, Coenen talked to his team, stating they had the advantage despite the losses. They led 3-2 and had a runner on base in the bottom of the fourth inning.

Turns out, the Chanhassen coach was right.

“We strive on competition. And in the biggest moments, in competition, your top athletes come through. Ours really did today,” he said.

The Storm added insurance runs in the fourth and fifth innings, needing every bit of them late in the game with things getting mighty interesting.

Holding a 5-2 lead in the seventh inning, Buffalo loaded the bases on a walk, single and hit-batsmen. Enter Marybeth Olson.

Olson, who last pitched May 17, hurting her thumb in pre-game warm-ups May 19 against Bloomington Jefferson, requiring stitches, gave the “I’m good” nod to Coenen.

“Her second-to-last strike, wow she had some fire. Walking out there I just made eye contact with her and I asked her, ‘Can you do this’, and she said, ‘yes.’ That’s all I needed to hear from her. She’s a competitor,” Coenen said.

The first out was a huge one, a sliding catch from Emily Saurer that likely would have resulted in two, maybe all three runners scoring.

A bloop single over second base pulled Buffalo within 5-3 with one out, but back-to-back strikeouts, each pitch Olson looking stronger, sent Chanhassen into celebration mode on the first-base line.

“I knew I could do it, but I didn’t think I would have to pitch,” said Olson, who had the stitches taken out just days before state. “I just think it was adrenaline. The circumstances. We just wanted this so bad. I just threw.”

Olson, credited with the save, was one of three all-tournament selections for Chanhassen along with winning pitcher Manno and catcher-third baseman Jessica Bren.

Manno was 12-0 in the pitcher’s circle for the season.

Bren staked Chanhassen to a 3-0 lead in the first inning with her second home run of the state tournament, and third in the post-season. The all-state junior led the state in home runs with 11 this season.

O’Keeffe started the first-inning threat with a sharp single, advancing to third base on a Olson sacrifice bunt, the throw off line allowing both runners to reach. Bren worked the count full, sitting on a 3-2 change-up for the blast over the left-center field fence.

Chanhassen was on cruise control until the fourth inning before a solo home run from Buffalo’s Sarah Hudson broke up the shutout. Consecutive walks and a single from the No. 9 hitter plated a second run before Manno shut the door with her fifth strikeout.

Leading 3-2 in the bottom of the fourth inning, a lightning strike north of the park halted the four state championship games. Torrential rains, pea-sized hail and strong winds – limbs of trees strayed everywhere – followed.

After a more than a three-hour delay, the game was picked up with Karin Ellefson, who had earlier singled, on first base. After two bunt singles from Tori Tollefson and Saurer, a fielder's choice off the bat of Hayley Haakenstad, the lone senior in the line-up, added a run at 4-2.

Chanhassen also scored a run in the fifth inning on an Olson single and stolen base followed by a Bren RBI-single to right-center for the three-run advantage.

Maddie Schwartz, called into relief, faced just three batters in the fifth inning, falling into trouble in the sixth with three straight one-out walks. The Chanhassen sophomore got a second out on a 3-1 pitch on a ground out before a fly out to shallow left ended the threat.

Bren was 2-for-3 with four RBIs for Chanhassen, which had six of nine spots in the batting order recording at least one hit. The Storm stole five bases in the championship win.

Chanhassen finishes the season with a 23-3 record.

"This means the world to us. We made it here last year and didn't do as well as we wanted to, so our goal from the start of the season was to get back here and win the whole thing. To do so, it feels amazing," Olson said.

<u>CALLED INTO DUTY</u>

Coenen said it was a "happy moment" seeing freshman Callie Bonk at first base late in the game. Bonk, who played in the state tournament in 2015, in which Chanhassen placed sixth, didn't see the field much this season.

But there she was, called into duty, for two-plus innings at first base.

Bonk, the younger sister of 2015 state champion baseball player Jordan Bonk, finished a double play in the fifth inning with a scoop of a low throw in the dirt. She also walked on four pitches in her lone at-bat.

"Those kids we put out in the field, and we had several changes in the field, twice, I never doubted those kids one bit. You have to go by what you see in practice. You have to go by what you believe in," Coenen said of Bonk, Miller and Dammann.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

Some in the position of Haakenstad, her future in tennis at the University of Nebraska, wouldn't have come out for a spring sport, focusing on what lies ahead.

That isn't Haakenstad.

Juggling a tennis tournament schedule to prepare for next school year with the Huskers with the softball schedule was a challenge at times, but the starting center fielder wouldn't have had it any other way.

A state champion in the fall in singles, Haakenstad added a state title in softball, smiling all the way.

"I'm not saying Buffalo didn't want it, I'm just saying we wanted it just a little bit more. There's no better way to end anyone's career as a champion. Only a few teams get to play on the final day," she said.

There was a lot of emotion. This team is like a family. That's why winning this was so great," Haakenstad added.