

## CN Softball: Angela Malgieri rallies Red Devils to tournament title

Written by

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As a left-handed slap hitter with deceptive power, Angela Malgieri can lure opposing defenses into a false sense of security.

The Sparta High School softball team, which played its infield in and its outfield shallow with Malgieri at bat in the sixth inning, paid dearly when she drove an outside fastball the other way.

Malgieri plated the tying run with her clutch one-out double over the left fielder's head, and came around to score three pitches later, leading the Red Devils to a 2-1 comeback victory in Saturday's Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Tournament final at Lenape Valley.

Winning pitcher Courtney Yard, who surrendered an unearned run in the first, settled down to outduel Samantha Greiner.

Yard didn't walk a batter until issuing two free passes in the seventh. After batterymate Kristin Zahn made a spectacular diving catch on an attempted

sacrifice, Yard struck out the final two batters to escape the jam. She finished with 12 strikeouts, including seven of the last eight batters.

Greiner dominated Hunterdon Central over the first five innings, recording all 10 of her strikeouts including a stretch during which she fanned seven straight. She took a one-hitter into the sixth. The lone hit was Malgieri's first-inning slap single.

The Red Devils (23-1) were pesky at the plate. They fouled off a total of 15 two-strike pitches, worked the count full five times and went to 2-2 on four other occasions. They altered their approach at the plate after the fourth.

"We had been working on slashing a little bit," Hunterdon Central coach Pete Fick said. "They show the bunt and then they rear back and swing. It does shorten their swing, and I think it did have a lot to do with (the outcome)."

No. 9 batter Kelsey Lucas fisted a 3-2

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pitch for a bloop single over the first baseman's head to start the sixth-inning rally. She took second on a sacrifice bunt and scored on Malgieri's double over left fielder Jackie Perez's head. Malgieri's double was the first ball Hunterdon Central hit out of the infield.

"I always try to move them (defensive players) in by fake bunting," said Malgieri, who faked a drag bunt while taking a first-pitch strike in the sixth. "And then when I see that (defensive players shallow), I take a nice swing at it and hope it goes over their heads. That was perfect. It was exactly what I wanted."

Malgieri raced to third when Perez's throw to nail Lucas at the plate sailed to the backstop.

"There are certain situations we want (Malgieri) bunting in," Fick explained, "but in that situation she's on her own."

Yard, who went down swinging on a 3-2 pitch in her previous at-bat, shortened her swing and plated the speedy Malgieri with a slow dribbler down the first-base line, giving the Red Devils a 2-1 lead.

After struggling to command her pitches early, Yard was not about to relinquish the lead. Her body language and facial expressions revealed a more determined pitcher than that who surrendered a first-inning run.

Sparta's Courtney Noone reached on a fielder's choice with one away and raced to third when Greiner's liner to left was

misplayed into a two-base error. Mary Kociencki followed with a single to center, giving the Spartans (15-3) a 1-0 lead.

"With the (first) run against you, it's definitely more pressure, but I settled down and made sure I was pitching like it was still a 0-0 game," Yard said.

Yard surrendered just one more hit the rest of the way, issuing a fourth-inning leadoff double to Kociencki. After being sacrificed to third, Kociencki was left stranded as Yard fanned the next two batters on nine pitches.

The Red Devils begin NJSIAA Tournament play Monday with a first-round game against Piscataway in the North 2 Group IV playoffs.

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