

SOFTBALL

Softball future bright at Travis

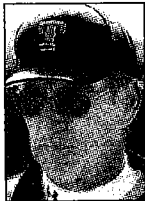
■ Youthful Lady Tigers looking forward after bi-district playoff loss

By **JASON McDANIEL**
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

CLEAR Creek swept Travis out of the playoffs in the first round last week. Afterward there were a few tears from the Lady Tigers, especially for the two seniors who never will taste a deeper run.

But Travis coach Gary Crissman never stopped smiling, even after the dust settled on his team's loss Saturday at Travis. He knew just making the playoffs was a big deal for the second-year team.

"I'm very pleased," Crissman said. "We still have nine of the 11 coming back next year, and at least I hope we're going to be back in this same



CRISSMAN

TRAVIS

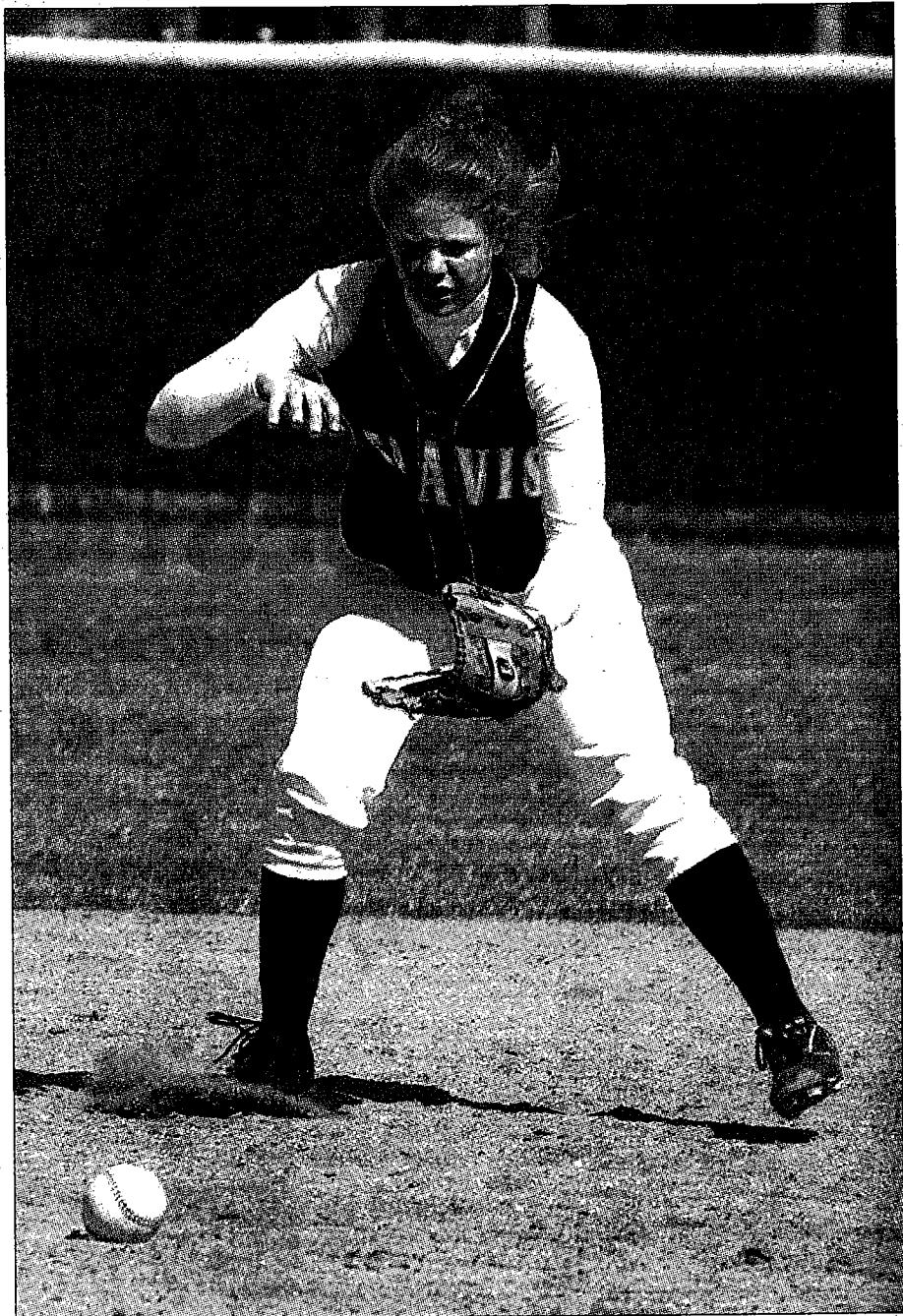
■ **Mascot:** Lady Tigers

■ **Coach:** Gary Crissman, second season

■ **2009:** District 23-5A member with Fort Bend Austin, Elkins, Bush, Kempner, Fort Bend Marshall, Hightower, Willowridge, Bush, Dulles and Clements.

■ **Final record:** 19-11, third in district, bi-district qualifier

■ **Key players:** P Alexis Estrada, 3B Sabrina Gonzales, SS Melissa Billingsley, LF Kaitlyn Jones, C Holly Berger.



L. SCOTT HAINLINE: FOR THE CHRONICLE

POSITIVE STRIDES: Junior shortstop Kaitlyn Jones will be back next season at Fort Bend Travis, as the Lady Tigers continue to improve.

situation next year."

And if they continue their current trend, they should take it a step further.

The Lady Tigers played their first season without any seniors, and their welcome to varsity play was brutal. They went 0-9 in non-district against stiff competition.

"It was a learning experience," Crissman said. "We set goals at the beginning

of the year and they probably exceeded what actually happened. ... But with everybody coming back this year, they realized they could be better.

"We only finished one game out of the playoffs last year. It came down to the last week of the season for us."

That's because they made strides midseason, picking up all nine of their

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SOFTBALL: Estrada led Travis from mound

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wins last season in district. The strong finish was good enough to put them in fifth place at the end, just outside of the playoffs.

The good thing about not having seniors is that every starter returned, including No. 1 pitcher Alexis Estrada, who was just a junior this season. She carried the load most of the way, including starting both playoff games.

Estrada took a 13-7 record and 155 strikeouts into the postseason.

"She was my workhorse," Crissman said. "She wanted the ball this year. She asked me to pitch her in every game I could possibly pitch her without wearing her out."

Travis picked up its biggest win April 20, defeating Fort Bend Austin 2-0 to clinch the third seed, ahead of fourth-place Austin. Travis went 12-5 in district, a three-game improvement over last season.

"That was by far our biggest win," Crissman said. "That was the one that lifted a weight off the girls' shoulders. They realized they can compete."

Of course, they ended up having to wait an extra week to do so in the playoffs after the UIL suspension of athletics for the swine flu. But even after falling 2-1 and 3-2 to Clear Creek, Crissman didn't blame the delay.

"(Clear Creek pitcher) Katy



ERNIE CHAN: FOR THE CHRONICLE

HELPING OUT: Holly Berger helped lead Fort Bend Travis to the softball playoffs.

Moulder had a lot to do with this," Crissman said. "When I looked in the Chronicle and she was one of the five (top) pitchers in the preview, I knew we were going to have our work cut out."

That they did, but they never gave up.

Down 3-0 after five perfect innings by Moulder on Saturday, the Lady Tigers rallied in the sixth and seventh innings, when the afternoon heat began to wear on the Lady Wildcats.

Kaitlyn Jones' leadoff single in the home sixth broke up Moulder's perfect game. Then Maryssa Silva reached on the first of three Creek errors. Both scored, Jones on Rachel Webster's RBI single.

With the tying run at third in the seventh, Silva tried twice to execute a squeeze bunt but struck out. Webster followed with a fly out to left

that sent the Lady Wildcats to the second round of the playoffs.

"(Moulder) was perfect through five, and usually — even in baseball — once you break up that no-hitter, it just seemed things started happening our way," Travis coach Gary Crissman said.

"And it came down to execution of a bunt, and that's the best I can ask for."

Webster and senior Becca Rush, who signed with Trinity, will graduate later this month, but every other Lady Tiger will return, including juniors Holly Berger, the team's standout RBI leader, and Kim Pepper.

They'll also welcome back two players who made an impact in their first season, sophomore third baseman Sabrina Gonzales — the team's defensive MVP — and freshman shortstop Melissa Billingsley.

"They realized how close we were last year," Crissman said. "We were one little play here and one play there away and things easily could have gone our way. They just didn't."

"So we came in with a clean slate and said 'Hey, these things are going to turn around for us,' and it seems like everything this year was just the opposite. We caught a lot of breaks, made a lot of good plays and got some key hits, and that was the difference."