



## Oriole pitcher receives Flyer honor

By Brent Glasgow

AVON—

One might not think tracking down a high school athlete for an award presentation would be much of a task, but not every athlete has had the summer schedule of Avon softball ace and Hendricks County Flyer Spring Sports Female Athlete of the Season Jenny Esparza, who finally received her award Wednesday.

When Esparza's sophomore season ended with a disappointing 3-1 loss to eventual state champion Hamilton Southeastern two months ago, her second season began. Playing with Team Indiana's 16U squad, she has toured the country as a member of one of the state's premier club teams while playing some of the best teams from across the United States, ending with the American Softball Association Nationals in South Dakota last weekend. The team also played in Oklahoma, Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky.

Esparza said she believes the summer experience has made her a better player and showed her how hard she has to work to be the best.

"It's great inspiration to work harder," she said.

Esparza's sophomore campaign was one to remember. While going 26-4 on the mound, she had a school record 407 strikeouts — the third-best single-season total in IHSAA history — and a 0.35 ERA. She hit .418 at the plate with 41 hits and 28 RBI.

"It was exciting, I had a lot of fun," Esparza said of Avon's season. "It was a learning experience and I felt we came out and finished great."

Esparza said she improved her velocity and control as the Orioles' season went on, and that it took some time to get over the pressure of replacing current Butler pitcher Jennifer Chasteen, one of the best to ever put on an Avon softball uniform.

"I was very nervous," she said. "I just tried my best and did what I could."

Although Esparza went 4-0 and didn't give up a run her freshman year, Avon coach Jenny Shayotovich said her performance last season couldn't have been expected.

"She had a tremendous season and exceeded all of our expectations," Shayotovich said. "We knew she would be impressive and that she was very talented, but she just blew numbers out of the water. The way she conducted herself on the field was also impressive — being so young."

Shayotovich credited Esparza's ability to stay even-keeled — even though she plays with intensity — as a big factor in why the Orioles were so successful as a team.

When it comes to next spring, Esparza said there will be no lack of drive for the Orioles, especially when facing the HSE squad that ended their stellar season and accounted for two of the team's four losses. The Royals may be without all-everything pitcher Morgan Melloh, but that won't dampen a win over the Orioles' Hoosier Crossroads Conference rival.

"We're going to win next year," Esparza said emphatically. "That's one of my goals, to beat HSE. Of course Morgan won't be there next year, but it'll still feel good to beat them."

Along with the Orioles' other returning players, Shayotovich can't help but smile about having Esparza for two more seasons.

"I'm excited she has two more years, because I can't even imagine the things she can still accomplish," Shayotovich said.

brent.glasgow@flyergroup.com

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