

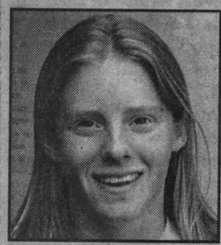
April 30
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PRIMETIME PREPS

■ Erin McFarland

Spring should be a time of joy. Especially for top athletes who have helped lead their teams to league titles and into the section playoffs.

But last year, Erin McFarland's grandfather died just before the softball Tournament of Champions began. She flew to Arizona for the funeral and flew back just in time to face eventual champion Casa Roble in the first round. Losing her biggest fan is still on her mind.



"I think about it all the time," McFarland said. "He loved watching me play."

This spring though, McFarland (5-2) has Christian Brothers right back atop the Metro League standings, striking out 64 batters in 55 innings with a stingy earned-run average of 0.38. When she's not pitching, she keeps herself busy as one of the top shortstops in the area.

The on-field success should come as no surprise. Her sister Terri was a star pitcher for Hiram Johnson and went on to earn Big Ten Freshman of the Year and Player of the Year honors for the University of Iowa. Now graduated, Terri often watches her younger sibling, even rooting for her against the Warriors. And she offers advice when she can.

"It's cool," Erin said. "She has experience. She knows what she's talking about."

Erin has some experience of her own. She has racked up all-league honors in softball, basketball and volleyball.

— Kevin D'Onofrio

■ Fact file

School: Christian Brothers.

Sport: Softball.

Position: Pitcher/shortstop.

Career goal: McFarland plans to major in early childhood education and teach kindergarten or first grade.

Athletic weakness?: Golf. "I don't play that much, so I'm not good. But I'm not completely horrible."