

Softball titles hinge on last-inning rallies

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Stars and Stripes

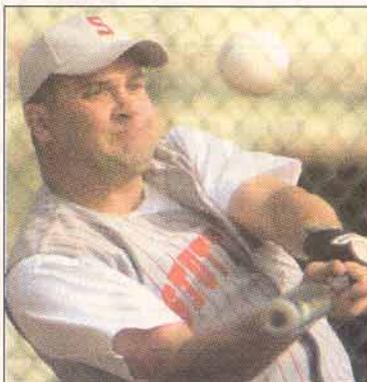
HEIDELBERG, Germany — One last-inning rally got trumped and another fell short Sunday as the Kaiserslautern women and Stuttgart men claimed the 2004 Army Europe slow-pitch softball titles. K-town's Lady Panthers posted a walk-off 9-8 victory over Heidelberg with a three-run rally in the bottom of the seventh, while the Stuttgart Stallions held off defending champion SHAPE 15-11.

K-town women 9, Heidelberg 8

Libby Barnaby stroked a fielder's choice grounder to Heidelberg shortstop Tiffany Collins with one out in the bottom of the seventh that scored Emily Murphy with the winning run. The play capped a three-run rally that erased a two-run lead Heidelberg had fashioned with a five-run top of the seventh.

Barnaby hit a grounder between Collins and the bag. Collins fielded the ball and stepped on second to force Kate Connolly, fresh off delivering a two-run single to tie the game, but Barnaby beat the relay to first that would have ended the inning and allowed Murphy to tally the game-winner.

"The hit was really ugly," Barn-



RAYMOND T. CONWAY/Stars and Stripes

Stuttgart's Mitch Johnson connects for a hit during Sunday's final game of the community-level softball championship.

aby said, "but I knew I had to hit it somewhere. I have speed and I knew there was no way they were going to double me up."

Barnaby's hustle made a winner of K-town pitcher Kathy Dowling and tagged Heidelberg's Mary King Espinal with the loss.

Gracie Clowe and Dowling stroked singles to left to start the rally, and after Melissa Parish fouled out and Murphy walked, Connolly delivered a ringing single to left to plate Clowe and Dowling and tie the score.

Dowling wasn't surprised at the way her team shrugged off Heidelberg's five-run seventh.

"We always come back," Dowl-



RAYMOND T. CONWAY/Stars and Stripes

Kaiserslautern's women celebrate their 9-8 victory over Heidelberg in the final game of the community-level softball championship.

ing said. "I knew if we could hold them, we could come back. We can hit."

Heidelberg had taken an 8-6 lead in the seventh on five consecutive hits after a lead-off strikeout. Marcella Johnson's RBI single tied the game, and a two-run single by Doris Morgan put Heidelberg in front for the first time in a

game that saw its defense let down in the early going.

Stuttgart men 15, SHAPE 11

Leading 11-4 going into the top of the seventh, the Stallions cleared their bench and pinch-hit for most of their starting lineup. The substitutes — Mike Lyons, Kevin Choclat, Jody Hawkins,

Reggie Evans, Jose Lustar and Robert Moxham — came through with five hits and four runs that loomed unexpectedly large when defending champion SHAPE mounted a seven-run rally in the bottom of the inning.

No one from Stuttgart was surprised at the SHAPE comeback.

"They're a good team," said winning pitcher Mike Brown, who fanned two SHAPE batters in the final frame on a rainbow pitch that came out of the sun as a white blur.

"I saw the sun in their faces," Brown said, "and just kept it up there."

SHAPE stroked six hits in the final inning, marked by an intentional pass with the bases loaded to SHAPE slugger Ernie Surber. Surber had opened the game with a blast over the gym behind the 25-foot left-field fence and singled sharply in third before Brown conceded him first base in his final two at-bats.

"My guys did an excellent job," Brown said. "We lost two in the round robin, but they never got down. We got everybody into the game and everybody got a hit."

They'll get a chance to do it again this weekend, when the U.S. Forces Europe titles are on the line in Aviano against the champions and runners-up of each sex from the USAFE tournament. All four of Saturday's finalists in Heidelberg are scheduled to play in Aviano.