

Lady Cats overcome slow start to beat Ottawa



Louisburg senior Bailey Belcher goes up for a shot and gets fouled Friday during the Lady Cats' game at Ottawa High School. The Lady Cats rallied from 20 points down to beat the Cyclones, 48-44.

OTTAWA – For the first 12-plus minutes of Friday's game with Ottawa, the Louisburg girls basketball team found themselves in dire straits.

The Lady Cats had managed just two points during that stretch and were down 20 with three minutes left in the first half.

Offensively, no matter what the Lady Cats tried, nothing seemed to work.

"Based on some of the shots I saw in the first quarter, it was just us and trying to get settled down," Louisburg coach Shawn Lowry said. "Maybe we practiced really hard for those first four days that we were off, because we were all amped up for those first few shots of the first quarter."

Once the lid finally came off the basket for Louisburg, that all changed.

Louisburg put together a furious rally that eventually ended in a 48-44 victory over the Cyclones and gave the Lady Cats a big road win in the process.

"It was great, especially to do it at this point in the season and battle back like we did on the road," Lowry said. "Ottawa has been playing really well here the last couple weeks and we knew it would be tough coming in."

"To play as poorly as we did to start that game, and for the girls not to lose focus, was great to see. What I was most proud of is they battled together. It wasn't one person battling by themselves, they battled together. They played for each other and that was fun to watch."

As good as the ending was, the beginning was a tough one to watch for Louisburg as Ottawa jumped out to an 11-2 lead at the end of the first quarter. The scoring drought continued into the second quarter and the Cyclones eventually took a 22-2 advantage with under four minutes left in the first half.

Along with their offensive woes, the Lady Cats were also battling their 12 first half turnovers that turned into some easy Ottawa baskets.

Senior Isabelle Holtzen ended Ottawa's long run with a 3-pointer with 3 minutes and 10 seconds left in the second quarter and the Lady Cats started chipping away from there.

Louisburg (7-9) eventually whittled the Ottawa lead to 24-13 at halftime as it ended the first half on an 11-2 run thanks to six straight points from junior Carson Buffington and another basket from freshman Brooklyn Diederich.

Still, the Lady Cats had a lot of work to do in the second half.



Freshman Brooklyn Diederich puts up a shot in the lane Friday against Ottawa.

"The message to the girls at halftime was the game isn't over and we have to chip away at this," Lowry said. "I told the girls that it starts with what we do defensively. We have to win the 50-50 balls and we have to win the rebounds and then the offense will come from that. It just seemed like we settled down in the second half."

Ottawa still led by 10 late in the third quarter when freshman Madilyn Melton connected on a 3-pointer and another freshman, Alyse Moore, scored near the basket to make it 34-29 going into the final eight minutes.

Buffington, who finished with a team-high 16 points and seven rebounds, hit one of her four 3-pointers to get Louisburg within one with 4:40 left, but seconds later the Lady Cats would be without their leading scorer as she fouled out of the

contest.

Several Lady Cats picked up her slack down the stretch. Holtzen hit the go-ahead jumper with 2:17 remaining, while senior Bailey Belcher connected on 3 of 4 at the free-throw line to widen Louisburg's lead to 46-43 with 1:06 left as she finished with eight points on the night.

"Bailey came through late for us there at the end," Lowry said. "In fact, she was the one who stayed late after practice (Thursday) to work on free throws and I really think it paid off."

Diederich and Melton each hit 1 of 2 free throws in the final seconds to help hold off the Cyclones and complete their furious comeback.

Melton and Diederich provided Louisburg with big minutes down the stretch as they scored nine and five points, respectively, while Moore filled in for Buffington down low late with six rebounds. Melton also tied Buffington with a team-high seven rebounds.

"I thought both Brooklyn and Alyse are both growing and maturing throughout the season and what a great time for both of them to step up and do what they did to contribute to this," Lowry said. "They are still freshmen, but getting opportunities like this is good for them, and at this point in the season they are no longer freshmen. They are basketball players."

Louisburg will try to build on its win Tuesday as it faces another difficult test when it travels to No. 1 Baldwin in its first of four final regular season games.

"As we prepare for our run, this is absolutely one we can use later on," Lowry said. "We have young and inexperienced players who got experience in a big game on the road. To come from that far behind, and not just compete, but to win, we

will definitely use and build off this.”

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48				

OTT	11	13	10	10 –
44				

LOUISBURG (7-9): Carson Buffington 16, Madilyn Melton 9, Bailey Belcher 8, Brooklyn Diederich 5, Isabelle Holtzen 5, Haley Cain 3, Alyse Moore 2. Totals: 14-50 13-22 48. 3-point field goals: 7, (Buffington 4, Belcher, Holtzen, Melton)