

Cats overcome odds to sweep No. 3 De Soto



Junior Cole Kramer crosses home plate and is congratulated by teammates Matt Risenhoover (left) and Mitchell Caldwell following his inside-the-park home run Tuesday against De Soto at Lewis-Young Park.

The odds were certainly stacked against the Louisburg baseball team Tuesday when it hosted De Soto.

Not only was De Soto the defending state champion, it is ranked No. 3 in Class 4A-Division 1 and brought an imposing lineup that featured Wichita State commit Greyson Jenista.

Louisburg, on the other hand, was without No. 1 starter Lucas Smith due to an injury. The Wildcats were also without their coach, Jeff Lohse, who was out with an illness and missed his first game in his 17 years.

All that didn't seem to matter much to the Wildcat players as they put their best two games together of the season to upset De Soto 5-3 and 11-1. It also marked four wins in a row for Louisburg and it has now won eight of its last 10.

"This is really big for our team and a real confidence builder for us," junior Cole Kramer said. "With them being the defending state champion, hopefully these wins will carry over

into the rest of the season. I know coach (Lohse) is going to be really happy when he hears about it and proud of us. Hopefully he gets better soon and it will be good seeing him again."

In the first game, Louisburg (9-5) got on the board early and forced De Soto to play from behind. The Wildcats scored four runs in the first inning to take De Soto a little off-guard.

Kramer led the inning off with a walk and Mitchell Caldwell singled to put two runners on for Austin Henderson, who followed with a 2-run double. After a single from Grant Harding, Henderson scored on a fielder's choice by Alex Dunn and Matt Risenhoover singled home pinch-runner Cale Schneider to make it 4-0 early.

"Scoring early was imperative," said assistant coach Jarrod Worthington, who filled in for Lohse in his absence. "If you get into a hole against a program as accomplished as De Soto, you never know if you'll be able to get out. On top of that, it's one thing to say that you're ready to take on the big dogs, but it's another thing to go out and do it. And for us to score in the first inning of both games meant the world to us.

"Instantly our guys believed that we could do this; that it wasn't just talk. Plus, if you look at game one, their starting pitcher really took over in the later innings. So we needed each and every run that we scored early."

Risenhoover followed with an RBI single in the third inning to make it 5-0. Going back to last week's doubleheader with Osawatomie and his first two bats against De Soto, Risenhoover was 8-for-8 and reached base 10 straight times.

Harding, the Wildcats' starting pitcher, shut down De Soto in the first three innings and he also picked off two runners in the first inning to keep them off the board. De Soto would score three runs in the fourth inning to get back in the game,

but Harding worked around 12 base runners in five innings before handing the ball to Kramer to work the final two.

Kramer pitched two strong innings to pick up the save and recorded three strikeouts. He faced the heart of the De Soto order in the seventh inning, but struck out the final two batters, including Jenista with a curve ball on a 3-2 pitch.



Sophomore Dalton Stone follows through on a pitch during Tuesday's home contest against De Soto.

"Cole was told that he might be used in the closer's role, and he really embraced the challenge," Worthington said. "He inherited one runner in the sixth and the tying run was at the plate, but Cole came in throwing strikes."

Defense was also a big factor for the Wildcats, especially in the opener. The outfield of Kramer, Ethan Caldwell and Korbin Hankinson ran down several balls, but it was third baseman Colton Smith who saved the most runs.

Smith helped turn two double plays on hard base hits his way and also made several diving stops that kept the De Soto offense at bay.

"The defense was big for sure," Smith said. "I was just doing

my job and everyone just came together and did their part. It was good to see.”

The fireworks started in the nightcap as the Wildcats offense came alive. De Soto’s starting pitcher had to leave with an injury in the first inning and Louisburg took advantage.

De Soto scored a run in the first, but Louisburg scored four in its half of the first thanks to RBI singles from Harding and Alex Dunn. Dalton Stone broke the game open with a 2-run single to score Harding and Dunn.

Stone took the mound for the Wildcats in the nightcap, and despite a shaky start, settled down for another strong performance. He pitched a complete game and allowed one unearned run on three hits to go along with five strikeouts.

“Dalton was coming off of a complete game shutout on Thursday, and you can tell that he is starting to look comfortable on the hill,” Worthington said. “He shrugged off an early error and didn’t let an unearned run affect him at all. I was impressed with his ability to not only get the ground ball when we needed it, but also put batters away with his fastball as well as his curve.

“I think our guys are glad they don’t have to face him, because right now he can beat you in a lot of ways. His ball has good movement, and it is so fulfilling to see him gaining confidence. For Dalton to pitch another complete game is a tremendous lift for our team, so that we can have more arms available for Thursday’s doubleheader.”

The Wildcats then started to have a little fun as Dunn launched a 2-run home run in the second inning to make it a 7-1 game and the Wildcats widened that lead in the fifth.

With two on and two out, Kramer hit a fly ball to center field. De Soto’s centerfielder seemed to lose the ball in the sky and the other outfielders were already making their way to

the dugout thinking it was going to be the third out.

The ball landed behind the centerfielder and Kramer used his speed to complete the 3-run inside the park home run.

"I saw him and he was just standing with his arms out and I was just hoping that he dropped it or it landed behind him," Kramer said. "Luckily it landed behind him and I just booked it home. It was good."

Kramer led the Wildcat offense with a four-hit game and Mitchell Caldwell finished with three hits, including a pair of doubles, one of which nearly went over the wall after Kramer's inside the park home run.

Colton Smith also finished with three hits and Dunn added a pair of hits to help Louisburg. The sweep was a perfect way for the Wildcats to help heal an ailing Lohse.

"I can't put into words how much I wanted this for coach Lohse," Worthington said. "He has put in so much time behind the scenes to find any little way to improve this program. It all came together tonight, and the only negative thing I can think of for this evening is that he didn't get to see the culmination of his hard work."

"His philosophies have allowed every single one of our players to improve in their role on this team, and I am so proud to be a part of his coaching staff, because I believe in everything that he stands for. We can't wait to get him back. He is Louisburg baseball."

Louisburg returns to action tonight when it hosts Chanute at Lewis-Young Park. First pitch is set for 4:30 p.m.