

Paola gets best of Louisburg baseball in opener



Louisburg catcher Alex Dunn reaches down to put a tag on a sliding Paola runner during the Wildcats' season opener last Thursday at Lewis-Young Park. The Wildcats fell to No. 3 Paola 8-0 and 6-3.

It is never easy when you have to play your rival to open the season and it is even harder when that team is one of the top five teams in the state.

That was the test the Louisburg baseball team faced last Thursday in its home opener at Lewis-Young Park. The Wildcats met Paola, which is ranked No. 3 in Class 4A-Division I, and found themselves trying to shake off the rust.

Paola shutout Louisburg 8-0 in the first game of the doubleheader, but the Wildcats settled down in the nightcap before eventually losing 6-3.

"During the first game we played very tight, a tension that I was feeling as well," Louisburg coach Joel McGhee said. "Facing a rival and league opponent, who happens to be ranked, in the first game of the year adds a significant amount of pressure. Despite the pressure, we were getting the ball in play, but hitting balls right at the defense. We made several

mental mistakes, which will come with getting back into competition, and struggled to communicate with each other.

“During the second game we relaxed and were back to the team that we see at practice each day. The guys were communicating, being more supportive of each other, and playing relaxed. The hits started to fall in, but we had a lot of strikeouts and left guys on base.”



Blake Ruder looks to make contact with a pitch during the Wildcats' season opener against Paola last Thursday.

Senior Colton Smith started the opener for the Wildcats and got off to a strong start as he worked around pair of walks to strikeout the side in the first inning. Smith gave up a run in the second, but struck out two more batters.

Paola got to Smith in the third inning as it scored three runs in the third and two more in the fourth to build a 6-0 lead. Smith finished the game with six strikeouts before junior Sam Guetterman came in for relief.

“Colton was filling the strike zone and he was throwing hard,” McGhee said. The hits were just dropping. A few batters

slipped away when we were ahead in the count, but Colton threw well for his first outing.”

The Wildcats (0-2) had six hits in the first game, including a pair of singles from Grant Harding and double from Cole Kramer. Smith, Matt Risenhoover and Cale Schneider each had a single.

In the nightcap, sophomore Dalton Stone got the start for Louisburg, but the Panthers scored three runs in the first two innings and the Wildcats had to dig out of a hole early.



Louisburg third baseman Colton Smith tags out Paola's Mason McDow in the first game of the Wildcats' doubleheader with the Panthers.

Louisburg scored a run in the fourth when Austin Henderson led off with a walk and later scored on an RBI single from Grant Harding. Paola had a 6-1 lead in the sixth, but the Wildcats continued to fight as they scored a pair of runs.

Alex Dunn, who led the Wildcats with a pair of hits, doubled and Stone singled to lead off the sixth. Risenhoover and Kramer followed with singles to score the two runs.

“We faced some good pitchers, but we were also hitting balls at guys and Paola made several great plays defensively,” McGhee said. “It takes some time to get back into competition mode and the hits will start falling. We had some missed signs and misunderstandings, which we’ll get ironed out.”

The Wildcats will try for their first win today when they travel to Prairie View. First pitch of the doubleheader is set for 4:30 p.m.

On Saturday, Louisburg will participate in a three-team tournament in Fort Scott. The Wildcats are slated to play Fort Scott at 10 a.m., followed by Ottawa at 11:45.