

Wildcats fall in dramatic fashion to end season



Louisburg catcher Alex Dunn tags out a Paola runner at the plate during the Wildcats' first round regional tournament game in Paola. The Wildcats took a lead into the final inning, but fell to the Panthers 4-3.

PAOLA – The Louisburg baseball team was just three outs away from creating some major reverberations at the Class 4A regional tournament in Paola.

Three outs and the Wildcats would knock off No. 1 seed Paola and they would find themselves in the regional championship game for the right to go to state. As it turned out, getting those outs was easier said than done.

After Louisburg took the lead with a run in the seventh inning, Paola answered with a pair of runs in bottom of the inning to win in walk-off fashion, 4-3, on May 17. The loss ended the Wildcats' season and they finished with an 8-12 record.

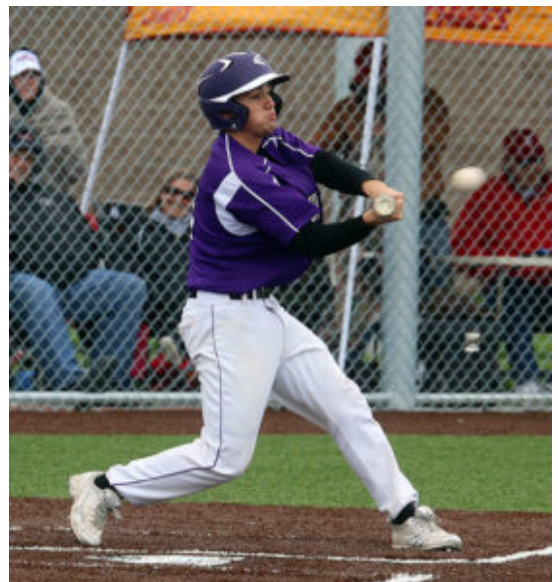
“It was a tough loss,” Louisburg coach Joel McGhee said. “Many of the guys were hoping to move deeper into the playoffs this year and to have the opportunity slip away hits hard. We played some of the best baseball we had all year and made some great plays to get out of a couple of jams. We hit well and did a good job moving on the base paths. We had key hits when

we needed them, but still left a number of runners on base.”

The game was tied at 3-all going into seventh inning thanks to the Louisburg defense the inning before. Paola appeared it was going to break the game open as it loaded the bases with no outs.

Louisburg got some help when Paola bunted foul for a third strike to get the first out. The Panthers then hit a sharp groundball, but Wildcat first baseman Austin Henderson made a diving stop and threw home to get the force.

Pitcher Colton Smith then coaxed a groundball his way for an easy third out and gave Louisburg some momentum.



Senior Cale Schneider connects on an RBI single during the Wildcats' regional tournament game on May 17 in Paola.

The Wildcats had one last rally in them as they were able to scratch out a run to take the lead a back.

Senior Cale Schneider reached on an error to lead off the inning, and with two outs, Paola intentionally walked

Henderson. Senior Alex Dunn made the Panthers pay as he singled to score Schneider and broke the tie.

Smith then singled to load the bases, but the Wildcats weren't able to get that extra run.

"The guys did a great job with two outs," McGhee said. "Dunn's at-bat after the initial walk to Henderson was huge. He kept us moving forward and elevated everyone's energy, we were able to load the bases, but came up short. It would have been great to pick up a couple of runs in that situation."

Paola reached on a Louisburg error to open the bottom of the seventh, the Panthers then singled and both runners stole a base to get on second and third with no outs. Smith was able to get a strike out, but the Panthers eventually singled to score both runs.

Dalton Stone started the game for Louisburg and went three innings and struck out a pair of batters. Smith came on in relief and pitched just over three innings and struck out six to keep the Wildcats in the game.



Louisburg third baseman Dalton Stone makes a throw to first base

**during the Wildcats'
regional tournament
game in Paola.**

"Stone and Smith both threw well," McGhee said. "They did a good job pitching against the hitters they faced and were selective with their pitches. Both did a good job working around the zone, and did not leave many pitches to be hit hard. However, we gave away some free bases that hurt us, but with good hitters at the plate working zone is necessary.

"It was great to have Smith available, as he was unable to play against Spring Hill, but when called upon he came out and gave it everything he had."

Paola struck first as it scored a run in the bottom of the first to take an early lead, but the Wildcats came right back with a run in the second as Blake Ruder singled home Smith to tie the game.

The Panthers took the lead back with another run in the bottom of the third, but again, Louisburg responded. Ruder led off the fourth inning with a double and then came around to score on a single from Schneider.

Dunn, Smith and Ruder all had two hits to lead the Wildcat offense and Ruder's double was the lone extra base hit for Louisburg.