

Wildcat baseball ready to improve on 8-win season



Louisburg senior Dalton Stone will be one of the Wildcats' starting pitchers this season along with fellow senior Grant Harding. Seven seniors return to lead Louisburg after an 8-12 season a year ago.

The Louisburg baseball team saw its season come to an end in dramatic fashion as it fell in the final inning to rival Paola in the regional playoffs.

If the loss wasn't tough enough, the Wildcats had to say goodbye to six seniors in the process.

Those things sometimes mean a team will be in rebuilding mode the next year, but not the Wildcats. Louisburg returns a seven-member senior class to help lead the Wildcats to what they hope is a farther run in the postseason.

"We have big expectations," Louisburg coach Joel McGhee said. "We are looking to improve on our record from last year, and have a group of seniors that have been very competitive in each sport they have played this year. They have the desire to work toward winning our regional and moving forward into the state tournament."

The Wildcats will try and better their 8-12 record a season ago and it starts on the mound. Seniors Grant Harding and

Dalton Stone will serve as the team's starting pitchers, while Kylan Harper, Sam Guetterman, Nate Swenson, Joe Allen, Noah Larson, Jakob Krause and Madden Rutherford will all see plenty of work, as well, in starting or relief roles.

"We have quality arms with significant experience returning this year," McGhee said. "Dalton and Grant have put in quality innings throughout their careers. Kylan came up with a solid win against Spring Hill at the end of last season, and we are looking for solid work from the recent Avila signee.

"All of those guys, and others, could see time as starters or relievers based upon our need and limitations from pitch restrictions."

A big reason for the larger pitching staff is the new pitch count rule that is in effect for the upcoming season. A pitcher will have to sit a number of days based on the amount of pitches thrown with a maximum of 105 pitches.

If a pitcher throws 76-105 pitches, they are required to sit four calendar days. They will have sit three days if 61-75 are thrown, two days for 46-60 and one day for 31-45 pitches.

Here are some guidelines on the rule from the Kansas State High School Activities Association:

- Required rest means calendar days. Throwing 105 pitches on Monday means the required rest period will be Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The first available day to return to competitive pitching is Saturday.
- All pitch count guidelines apply to an individual pitcher on a daily basis. For example, a pitcher could pitch in both games of a double header, not to exceed 105 pitches. The total number of pitches the pitcher throws that day will determine the pitcher's days of rest that must follow the double header.
- A player's pitch count and required days of rest apply

to games at any and all levels of play. Example: Player A throws 62 pitches in a junior varsity game. Player A must rest three days before pitching in a JV, varsity or other sublevel game.

- Number of pitches are competitive pitches only. Warmup or bullpen pitches do not count.
- A pitcher will be allowed to finish a batter if they reach the max of 105 in the middle of the at bat.
- If the pitcher is ambidextrous, the pitch count guidelines apply to the individual pitcher, not to the individual arm.

If a pitcher exceeds the 105 pitch limit, the player and coach will become ineligible until reinstated by the Kansas State High School Activities Association.

“It plays a role in both offensive and defensive strategies,” McGhee said of the new rule. “The challenge comes in managing pitchers on weeks when we play two double headers, one Tuesday and the next on Thursday. To make sure that we have enough arms available we will be floating a few pitchers between junior varsity and varsity. It will be an adjustment that both athletes and coaches will have to adjust to. Pitchers may enter a game with a quota of pitches.

“Pitching efficiently, getting batters to hit ground balls and fly balls and increasing strike to ball ratios, becomes more valuable than being a guy that can strike everyone out. Throwing efficiently allows pitchers to throw more frequently and allows the line-up to stay more consistent from game to game.”

Along with being on the mound, Harding will also see plenty of time as the team’s starting first baseman. Harding earned second team all-Frontier League honors last season in the outfield and is one of two returning all-league players. Fellow senior Korbin Hankinson will start in centerfield after being named to the honorable mention team last season.

Harding also had a big season offensively as he had a team-best .453 average in 58 plate appearances and had 24 hits. He ended up with four doubles, three triples, nine RBIs and had a .642 slugging percentage.

He also started four games on the mound and had a 2-0 record with 19 strikeouts, 16 walks and a 3.91 earned run average. In the outfield, Harding had just one error and added three assists.

Hankinson had a .333 average in 53 plate appearances with 14 hits and four RBIs. He also didn't have an error in his spot in the outfield and had two assists.

Senior Blake Ruder and junior Mitchell Drew will join Hankinson as the team's regular outfielders. Senior Ben Lajoie will see time at third base, while Swenson, a junior, is the team's starting shortstop. Guetterman will play at second while sophomore Beckett Rasmussen and junior Garrett Caldwell will share time as the team's catcher.

Harper, a senior, and Rutherford, a freshman, will also see time in the infield. Junior Christian Tosterud will also play in the outfield.

"Practice has been going well," McGhee said. "We have been able to get in a lot of good swings and been able to get quality time outside. During this time of year, it is always a guessing game as to how much time you will get outside and this year we have been able to get outdoors quite a bit. Having had good weather has allowed us to get in a lot of quality reps defensively.

"We all are definitely ready to get the season rolling. A month's worth of practice has everyone ready to see some competition. Scrimmages amongst each other are very beneficial, but they just aren't quite the same as testing your mettle against a rival."

Louisburg will host Prairie View on Thursday for a doubleheader in its home opener. First pitch is set for 4:30 p.m. at Lewis-Young Park.