

Lady Cats score first win over Paola in four years



Louisburg freshman Madilyn Melton goes up for two of her team-high 21 points against Paola on Tuesday at Louisburg High School. The Lady Cats downed the Panthers, 69-57, for their first win over the Panthers since 2014.

It has been four years since the Louisburg girls basketball team has left the floor after a victory over Paola.

Since then, there has been a lot of heartbreak and disappointment.

Louisburg got a chance to change all that Tuesday when it hosted its rival and the Lady Cats were able to turn the tables on the Panthers. There was no heartbreak this time around.

Defense and free throws turned out to be the difference as the Lady Cats were able to pull out a 69-57 win over Paola – their first victory over the Panthers since 2014.

“They are excited to win a basketball game, but at the same time they are collectively starting to figure things out,” Louisburg coach Shawn Lowry said. “Our effort and toughness was really good and Paola was a tough, physical team too. For us to play that way, and match that intensity and toughness, was important and we want to defend our home court with

everything we have.”

It all started on the defensive end of the floor for the Lady Cats as they forced 21 Paola turnovers and recorded 15 steals on the night.

Louisburg used a half-court trapping defense that took Paola out of any kind of rhythm offensively and led to several baskets in transition.

“It started defensively for us and that just fed into everything else,” Lowry said. “As a coach, I still see those things that we have to clean up, but it was a good team effort. They were able to respond and battle through adversity when it happened.”

The Lady Cats (6-8) experienced a little adversity in the fourth quarter. Louisburg held a 17-point lead early in the final period, before junior starter Carson Buffington fouled out.

Paola went on a run and cut the lead to seven with 2 minutes and 28 seconds left in the game, but the Lady Cats were able to put the game away at the free-throw line. Louisburg converted 33 of 45 free-throw attempts for the game, including 10 straight makes to end the game by senior Isabelle Holtzen, sophomore Carlee Gassman and freshman Madilyn Melton.

“It is nice to see some of our inexperience go away at the end of the game like that,” Lowry said. “Our kids stood tall, and Isabelle provided some great senior leadership and really took control of things when we were in foul trouble. Other people stepped up and made some good plays as well.

“We work a lot on free throws to win the game and that is what it came down for us. That won us the game.”



Louisburg senior Bailey Belcher gets fouled while driving to the basket Tuesday against Paola.

Louisburg also got a big performance from Melton, who didn't play like a freshman. With the game tied at 23-all late in the first half, the Lady Cat freshman scored 11 straight point as Louisburg went on an 11-4 run and took a 34-27 lead at halftime.

For the game, Melton finished with a team-high 21 points and 11 rebounds and she converted 12 of her 16 free-throw opportunities.

"I think all the girls did really, really well," Melton said. "Playing against Paola in middle school was tough, so coming in as a freshman playing varsity, I knew it was going to be even harder. I am just so proud of the girls and I knew we could pull through.

"I just want to go out there, and even though that I am a freshman, I want to be there for my team and help them when they need me."

The Lady Cats got big performances up and down their lineup. Holtzen was second on in the team in scoring with 18 points, including 9 of 10 from the free-throw line.

Along with Melton, Buffington also finished with a double-double with 10 points and 11 rebounds to to alon with a team-high four steals. Senior Bailey Belcher also added 10 points and three steals in the win, while sophomore Haley Cain added seven rebounds.

"We were all pretty hyped up for this one, knowing we were going to play our rival," Holtzen said. "We just played hard as a team and we played together, even though we had some foul problems throughout the game. I think everyone stepped up at the right time and we were able to get a big win."

Louisburg will hope to build on this win tonight when it hosts Eudora for a homecoming matchup. The Lady Cats hope to exact some revenge after falling to the Cardinals in overtime early in the season.

"We are preparing for this run here," Lowry said. "Now we are going back through the league teams, and when it is all said and done, we are going to be in Paola for a sub-state tournament. We are going to see them again on their senior night, so I am sure it will be emotional for them and it will be a tough place to play. We will be ready though."

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69				

PAO	9	18	6	24
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LOUISBURG (6-8): Madilyn Melton 21, Isabelle Holtzen 18, Bailey Belcher 10, Carson Buffington 10, Carlee Gassman 5, Haley Cain 5. Totals: 16-47 33-45 69. 3-point field goals: 4, (Holtzen, Melton, Belcher, Buffington)