

Wildcats earn split in season opener with Paola



Louisburg third baseman Garrett Caldwell throws out a runner during the Wildcats season opener last Thursday in Paola. Caldwell and the Wildcats won the nightcap, 9-5, to earn a split with Paola.

PAOLA – The Louisburg baseball team watched as Paola rolled its way to a 17-0 win in the opener of the two teams' doubleheader Thursday in Paola.

It was a sight that left the Wildcats a little frustrated.

Fortunately, Louisburg didn't have to wait long to redeem itself.

The Wildcats used a four-run fifth inning to break open a tie game and Louisburg held on for a 9-5 victory in the nightcap to earn the split. It was a game that was supposed to be played in Louisburg, but had to be moved due to field conditions.

"We have started out the past few seasons in a similar fashion, so pushing through and getting the victory in the second game was big," Louisburg coach Joel McGhee said. "We responded very well. In the first game we got hurt by several errors and struggled to put the ball in the strike zone. Offensively, we were unable to build any momentum.

“In the second game we cleaned things up defensively and improved our approach at the plate. Our pitchers filled up the zone and our defense performed very well behind them. We took advantage of the opportunities we had with runners on base and capitalized on several passed balls and errors.”

In the second game, Louisburg overcame an early 2-0 deficit with four runs in the third inning and then added another in the fourth before putting the game away in the fifth.

Junior Noah Larson led the Wildcat offense with a pair of hits and an RBI, but Louisburg got contributions from up and down its lineup. Six different Wildcats had hits and/or drove in a run.

Beckett Rasmussen, Garrett Caldwell, Garrett Harding, Chase Norton, Larson and Jakob Krause each had RBIs, while Krause had the team's lone extra base hit with an RBI double in the team's big fifth inning. Logan McClellan and Madden Rutherford also recorded base hits.

“The fifth inning was big,” McGhee said. “We capitalized on several errors and passed balls and had several timely hits. We showed some selflessness and moved runners into scoring position and made some good things happen. It was a great response to the top of the inning.”



Louisburg outfielder Beckett Rasmussen chases down a fly ball Thursday against Paola.

Rutherford started the game for Louisburg as he pitched 4 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings and gave up four earned runs, while striking out three in what was a cold, rainy and windy day.

After Rutherford got into trouble in the fifth inning when Paola scored three times to tie the game, Krause came in to stop the Paola rally. He pitched the final 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings and gave up just one hit during that span and struck out four.

Defense was also big for the Wildcats as they turned two double plays and committed just one error.

“Rutherford and Krause both threw well,” McGhee said. “They filled up the strike zone and allowed the defense to work behind them. Krause came into the game in a tough spot and got

two quick outs to end Paola's rally."

It was a rough first outing in its opener as Paola jumped out to a 5-0 lead after three innings, but the Panthers scored six runs each in the fourth and fifth innings to hand the Wildcats their first loss of the season.

The Wildcats couldn't get a hit off Paola starter Kurt Golubski and reached base just twice on walks from Nate Swenson and Harding, and Norton was hit by a pitch.

"We had multiple 1-2-3 innings and saw only three men get on base," McGhee said. "Golubski had a solid performance for Paola and we struggled to get things moving."

Louisburg returns to action this Thursday when it travels to Prairie View for another doubleheader. First pitch is set for 4:30 p.m.