

OPINION: Wildcats deserve to finish game – the right way



As the Louisburg baseball team walked off the Amelia Earhart Field and headed toward its bus Tuesday at Atchison High School, the Wildcats had no idea their season was about ready to come to a close.

Louisburg, the No. 15 seed, was trying to knock off No. 7 Paola to earn a berth in the state tournament after defeating No. 2 Atchison, 10-0, in the Class 4A regional semifinal.

The Wildcats were batting in the top of the seventh and had two runners on, with one out and down 3-1 in the championship game. Then the lightning came.

Thirty minute delay, they said.

Then with every lightning strike and clap of thunder, they started the 30 minute delay over. I think most of us that have attended enough sporting events have been through these types of delays before.

You either wait the storm out or suspend the game if the storm is too bad. That's how these things usually work out.

During the regular season, games that have completed five innings, and are called, are considered official games.

But that same rule can't be for the postseason too...can it?

Short answer – Yes.

With more raining moving in, the umpires were forced to call the game, thus giving Paola the 3-1 victory since five innings were played.

Regional officials contacted the Kansas High School Activities Association to see what their options were. Could they resume the game, or just suspend it to the next day?

KSHSAA informed the Atchison activities director that the game cannot be suspended and that it was officially a completed contest and would revert back to the previous completed inning, which was the sixth.

It was the last, and worst thing Louisburg head coach Kade Larson expected to hear following the delay.

"When I first found out I was absolutely gutted for the guys who worked so hard all year long for the opportunity to try to win a game in the seventh to go to state," Larson said. "I was not aware this was a postseason rule to be completely honest. My guys competed their butts off all night. We always talk about giving ourselves a chance in the seventh inning and we did just that."

The Wildcats had to work hard to get that chance in the seventh.

Louisburg had to go up against Paola ace Caden Marcum, who is a fantastic talent that has signed with the University of Tennessee. Marcum baffled the Wildcat hitters as he held them to just one run and struck out 11 batters.

However, Marcum had reached his pitch count limit after the sixth and the Wildcats faced off with a different Paola pitcher.

After a groundout to begin the seventh, the Wildcats got a single and worked a walk to get two runners on base. The heart of their order was coming up.

“We got to their bullpen and had all of the momentum,” Larson said. “I never would have dreamed they wouldn’t finish this game. We had the exact guys that we wanted to in that situation.”

What would have happened? No one will ever know, but that is the real problem here. The student athletes were not given the chance that every other team in the state had – an opportunity to play a full seven innings.

In Louisburg’s case, it meant an opportunity to advance to the state tournament – something they had been working since March to obtain.

Onlookers from different programs also voiced their displeasure on social media after they heard the news.

This is absolutely unconscionable. Players and coaches work too hard for an outcome to be decided like this. Not fair to anybody!! Feel so bad for Louisburg. <https://t.co/x6dP8nb0FM>

– FSHS Tiger Baseball (@FSTigerBaseball) May 18, 2022

This is wrong. We have failed kids in this instance. No guarantee the outcome changes but those kids and coaches deserve the chance. How does this happen?! <https://t.co/zLaTya7oaA>

– Coach Loomis (@CoachLoomis) May 18, 2022

I can’t wrap my head around this... it’s only Tuesday... just suspend and finish today? <https://t.co/yRTmlfB2Xa>

– Heath Gerstner (@CoachGerst) May 18, 2022

Lightning had littered the sky starting in the fourth inning and eventually began to get closer. With one out in the seventh, it had gotten too close and both teams went to their busses – what turned out to be for good.

Just like that the season was over, but even more heartbreaking, seniors Brandon Doles, Maverick Rockers, Kolby Kattau, Sam Hastings and George Reichart saw their high school careers come to a close – all thanks to Mother Nature and an outdated rule by KSHSAA.

There is almost 10 days before the start of the state tournament and the forecast is sunny and beautiful the rest of this week. The game could have easily been suspended and played at Paola today or tomorrow.

The players deserve the finality of it all and should not have to think about, what if.

Those seniors already had to go through that ‘what if’ moment two years ago when their season was cancelled due to COVID-19.

“The guys had no idea that would be the last time they touched the field together,” Larson said. “We were ready to come back and finish up at midnight if we had to. When I told them, everyone seemed to be in shock that they would let it end this way. I think for the most part all of us still are.”

The problem seems like a simple fix – play the game and let the kids decide who wins – not Mother Nature.

The rule makes sense during the regular season when it is hard to make up games – not for postseason play. The kids deserve better and there are people that let them down.

Sometimes, even in the postseason, there might not be an opportunity to suspend or postpone due to time constraints or field availability. Neither of those were the case here.

“The game could’ve been over the next pitch on a ground ball double play, it could’ve gone our way, or could’ve went Paola’s way later,” Larson said. “But we’ll never know...”

That is the unnecessary gut punch of it all.