

Lady Cats drop playoff opener, 7-3

Written by Don Wallace
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Lovejoy scored one run early, put up three more in the fifth and capped off the game with a three-run seventh as they took Game 1 7-3 of the bi-district series against Sulphur Springs.

The Thursday night Lady Cat home game belonged to the visitors as they seemed to come up with the clutch hits with runners in scoring position.

Sulphur Springs left seven runners stranded on the sacks.

"It's a series for a reason. We are not out of it yet, we have other chances," said David Carrillo, Sulphur Springs head softball coach. "We need to tighten up our defense."

Only two of the seven runs allowed by Sulphur Springs were earned. The Lady Cats had three errors in the field.

Game 2 in the best-of-three series is today at 7 p.m. at the Lovejoy field in Lucas. Game 3, if necessary, will be back at Lady Cat park, at 2 p.m. Saturday.

"I'm not mad or upset, just frustrated. Lovejoy got the big hits and we didn't," Carrillo said. "We have to answer, I challenged the girls to come out tonight and put together the key hits. We have to get people on base and then drive them."

Carrillo said the pitching between his starter Katie Sapaugh and Lovejoy's Danielle Brochu was about even.

"I'm sure the same two will pitch tonight. We can hit Brochu, she is not an overwhelming pitcher who gets lot of strikeouts," Carrillo said. "Katie Sapaugh pitched well. She got a little frustrated late in the game. Overall, I was pleased."

Lovejoy had 10 hits in the game as Sapaugh threw more than 130 pitches in the contest. She struck out seven.

Brochu threw 110 pitches for the Lady Leopards, 64 for strikes. She fanned four Lady Cats.

The Lady Leopards broke the seal on the scoreless game, pushing across a lone run in the third. Jaclyn Willis did the damage with a run-scoring double high off the centerfield fence.

Sulphur Springs responded in the bottom of the third with a single by Katie Barnett and walk by Kasey Moore. The Lady Cats could not push across the tying run.

Lovejoy struck for three runs in the top of the first. With one out the Lady Leopards got a walk and base hit. Sapaugh retired Willis on a pop fly to the outfield. But Brochu helped her own cause with an RBI single that went between Sapaugh's legs on the way to centerfield. Cleanup hitter Amanda Conner hit a soft single to shallow right field that scored another run and the visitors were up 4-0.

Brochu sat the Lady Cats down on just eight pitches in bottom of the fifth.

Sapaugh pitched out of jam in the bottom of the sixth. The Lady Leopards got base runners from a walk and single. No runs were allowed.

Sulphur Springs took advantage of wildness by Brochu in the bottom of the sixth with Kiara "Duke" Johnson and Moore drawing back-to-back walks to ignite the rally. Jaleigh Avery, a slugging senior who has signed to play softball at Blinn College, ripped two-run triple. Avery pumped her fist as she reached third base showing her enthusiasm to teammates. Sarah Womack was retired on an infield grounder. But during that at-bat, Avery scored easily on a wild pitch. With the score now 4-3, catcher Molly Johnston connected for a single. But was left

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stranded on the sacks as Kristen Allen and Mary Lopez were retired on pop fly outs.

The Lady Leopard immediately went back to the job of scoring and padded their lead with three runs in the top of the seventh. Again the middle of the lineup - Brochu and Conner came through with run-scoring hits. Kallie Killingsworth added an RBI single as the lead went to 7-3. An error helped the cause for the Lady Leopards.

Sulphur Springs got singles from Makayla Glosson and Moore, but could not score in their final chance in the bottom of the seventh inning.

The Lady Leopards left town up 1-0 in the series, taking the 7-3 victory.

"I think we will come out and play well in Game 2," Carrillo said. "We have won 20 games this year. We have been through stretches like this. We played two games with Mount Pleasant. We lost the first one, then came back to beat them in the second game and it was at their place. We can do this, we just have to get the hits and string them together to get runs. We have to play solid defense and hit the ball. If we don't, we will be in trouble."