

Sports

Taylor completes four-game sweep of Grace

By Sean Douglas

No. 18 Taylor, behind a furious rally in game one and sparkling relief pitching in game two, remained undefeated at Winterholter Field, finishing off its series with Grace with two more victories. The Trojans, facing an 8-3 deficit in the opener, rattled off 19 unanswered runs in the final four innings en route to a 22-8 triumph, before stout pitching by Tucker Waddups and Mitch Ubelhor in the nightcap resulted in a 4-2 win.

Along with improving to 16-0 at home, the Trojans have won 34 of their last 35 contests against the Lancers. Additionally, the Trojans improved to 28-1 against Grace at Winterholter Field and 45-3 against the Lancers under Head Coach Kyle Gould since 2005.

Nick Rusche led the Taylor offense in game one, finishing 3-for-7 with three runs scored, a grand slam,



Nick Rusche led a furious comeback for Taylor in its opener with Grace, hitting a grand slam late in the game to help the Trojans take control. **Photo provided by Taylor University**

and six runs batted in. TJ Bass, Conner Crawford, and Jacob Morris combined for five hits and nine RBI in the Trojans' 22-run explosion, while Kade Vander Molen and Camden Knepp each collected three knocks and two RBI in the contest.

Grace took a 1-0 lead after the first frame, but Morris responded for the Trojans in the top of the

second, crushing a three-run shot to center field, his third home of the season, to give Taylor a 3-1 lead.

The Lancers answered back, plating six runs in the bottom of the second and a single run in the fourth to turn their two-run deficit into a five-run lead.

The Trojans, however, were not daunted, using a nine-run sixth inning to

take the lead back for good.

Crawford opened the scoring on a Grace error, and Knepp followed with an RBI single, plating Brett Lawson. A Rusche RBI single and a Bass two-run double later in the frame tied the contest at 8-8, before a three-run bomb from Crawford, his fifth of the 2021 campaign, broke the tie, giving the Trojans an

11-8 advantage. Knepp capped off the inning with another RBI single, increasing Taylor's lead to 12-8.

The Trojans added 10 more runs in the top of the ninth to seal the deal, highlighted by Rusche's grand slam and a two-run double from Vander Molen.

Matt Dutkowski (4-2) earned his fourth win of the season in relief, allowing just one hit in 3.2 innings of work. He, together with Ubelhor and Drew Henrikson, pitched brilliantly in the final 5.2 innings, combining to give up just two hits and three walks while striking out 17.

Taylor grabbed the early advantage in the nightcap, taking a 3-0 lead after the first two innings of play. Crawford plated Rusche and Jonathan Foster with a two-run double in the first frame, before Joe Moran singled home Rusche in the second for the three-run advantage.

The Lancers, however,

pressured the Trojans in each of the following two innings, loading the bases in both, but Taylor limited the damage to just two runs. Luke Shively notched a strikeout with runners on first and second with two out in the third, before Waddups masterfully worked out of a bases-loaded, no-out situation in the fourth. With the bases full, Waddups induced a groundout that led to a 4-6-3 double play between Vander Molen, Rusche, and Moran, before punching out the final Grace batter of the frame to leave a runner stranded at third.

The Trojans were not threatened after that, as Waddups (1-0) and Ubelhor combined to allow only two hits and one walk, while striking out six in four innings of work.

Offensively, Rusche and Moran both finished 2-for-4 at the dish, while Crawford, Bass, Foster, and Ben Kalbaugh each added one hit.

Panthers come back to defeat Giants in 2021 opener

By Sean Douglas

For the first time since May of 2019, the sounds the baseball could be heard reverberating throughout Grant County on Monday evening.

And for the Eastbrook Panthers, after a year hiatus, the 2021 season got off to splendid start.

Behind the strong relief pitching of Jett Engle, combined with timely hits and an offensive explosion in the final four innings, the Panthers overcame an early four-run deficit, scoring 11 unanswered runs in an 11-4 victory over the Marion Giants at Art Caldwell Field.

The Giants started off hot, scoring four runs in the first two innings of play, but the Panthers scored at least two runs in each of the final four frames, including five in the fifth which allowed them to take a lead they would not relinquish.

"I'm not sure we have beat Marion since I've been here, but it's been a while since we started off 1-0," Eastbrook Head Coach Ryne Brown said. "It's a great feeling to start out this way. Everybody



contributed in some way today. It took them a while to get going, so the rust showed a little bit, but once it came off, we picked up where we left a couple of years ago."

Luke Shearer led the Eastbrook offense, finishing 2-for-5 with a double, a triple, and three runs batted in, while Isaac Rans went 2-for-2 with an RBI single and a sacrifice fly. Jason Hale scored three runs in the contest, while Raef Biddle, Ruben Rangel, and Rans each scored two.

Engle did an effective job of shutting down the Giants' offense after the second inning. In five frames of relief, Engle earned the win, striking out five and allowing just three

hits in five innings of work. Though he also walked six batters, he held the Giants scoreless in those five frames.

"Jett came in and was phenomenal," Brown said. "He's a competitor, and he can flat out ball."

For the Giants, JD Fagan finished 1-for-4 with a run scored and an RBI in the leadoff spot, while Cain Richardson collected a triple, two runs scored, and an RBI. Tyson Johnson added a single and a run, while AJ Mitchener, Brayton Patton, and Stephen Simmons each recorded one hit apiece.

Marion started the scoring in the first, as Richardson, after reaching base on a walk, scored on a pair of

Eastbrook throwing errors, giving the Giants an early 1-0 lead.

The Giants increased their advantage to 4-0 in the second with a little two-out magic. Fagan recorded the Giants' first RBI of the season, plating Johnson from second base with a single, before Richardson ripped a triple to right-center field to score Fagan from first base. The Giants scored their final run of the evening on a wild pitch, taking a 4-0 lead into the third inning.

However, after that, the Panthers found their offensive groove, and ultimately, swung momentum in their favor.

Shearer led off the top of the fourth with a triple and Rans reached on a walk, putting two runners on with nobody out. The Giants attempted to pick off Rangel, who was pinch running for Shearer, at third, but a bad throw allowed both he and Rans to score, cutting the Giants' advantage to 4-2.

"I liked the way we started the first four innings. We were great," Marion Head Coach Mark Fagan said. "But the error there [in the fourth] when

we tried to pick off that kid at third got us down a little bit. We had a couple of bad errors, and the one bad inning."

Eastbrook took control of the contest in the fifth, scoring five runs on two hits, five walks, and a hit by pitch. Schuylar Ashley, Biddle, and Hale were all walked to start the frame, before Shearer delivered another big hit, this time a two-run double, to give the Panthers the lead for good.

"I love that kid," Brown said. "He's been itching for this moment. He was ready and raring to go. I don't think I've seen that kid smile that much before in his life. It was great to see him come out and have a phenomenal game."

Rans tacked on another run with an RBI single, plating Hale, before he and Rangel came around to score on a pair of bases-loaded walks, giving the Panthers a 7-4 lead.

"It was just mental errors," Fagan said. "When we walk people, we can't get guys out."

From the fourth inning on, the Panthers exuded confidence at the plate, going after pitches in the

zone while also displaying patience in waiting for their pitch to hit.

"We talked about being patient, but being aggressive when it's there," Brown said. "We are looking for certain pitches early on, and if we get those, we are going to take them, and if not, we are going to sit on it and wait and see if we can get one we are looking for. It was just a matter of getting to the point where we felt a little more comfortable in the box."

In the sixth, Hale tripled and later scored on a passed ball, before Cooper Craw scored Conner Boyd with an RBI single.

The Panthers added a little insurance in the seventh, as an RBI groundout from Shearer and a sacrifice fly from Rans helped to secure Eastbrook's comeback, seven-run triumph.

And after a 1-0 start to the season, Brown and the Panthers are looking to keep their momentum going as the 2021 campaign gets underway.

"It's just a matter of keeping it rolling," Brown said. "We have to make sure we stay consistent and not get too overconfident."