



MENDOCINO-LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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EAGLES TOP YUBA WITH FIRST WALK-OFF WIN OF THE SEASON

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With threatening clouds gathering on the hills to the west and some isolated rain drops beginning to fall Tuesday afternoon at Mendocino College, it looked like the host Eagles baseball team and the visiting Yuba College 49ers baseball teams were on the verge of heading into extra innings.

The Eagles had fought back from a 6-2 deficit after five innings of play to finally catch Yuba in the bottom of the eighth with a 3-run rally. They had held Yuba scoreless in the top of the ninth.

There were two outs in the bottom of the ninth with a runner on first, with the Eagles sophomore left-handed batting left fielder Tano Garza at the plate, behind in the count 1-2 against Yuba's top reliever.

Garza had come up big in the eighth inning, blasting two-run double to cut Yuba's lead to 6-5. He then scored the tying run on a single.

In this at bat in the bottom of the ninth, Garza, had taken a first-pitch ball nearly thrown in the dirt and then swung and missed the next two pitches. One might have thought Garza might cut down on his next swing to at least put the ball in play.

Not the case. The next pitch he saw was a letter-high fast ball. He responded with a full swing, making solid contact, slightly to the bottom of half the ball, giving the ball backspin and loft.

The result was a booming high fly ball deep right. The Yuba right fielder, already playing deep, turned and took a few steps toward the outfield fence. But then he stopped and looked up toward the scoreboard several feet behind the fence.

Apparently, he and most of the other folks on hand, thought the ball was going to carry not only over the fence but likely hit or go over the scoreboard. It did neither.

With the usual brisk late-afternoon breeze in April blowing across the field from right to left, the flight of the ball was blunted. Instead of carrying over the scoreboard or even over the fence, the ball's downward trajectory was more abrupt than expected.



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It struck the yellow plastic tubing that caps the chain link outfield fence. Had the ball bounded beyond off the top of the fence and landed behind it, it would have been a home run. But it bounded back into the field of play and still a live ball in play.

Too late, probably regretting that he had not gone to the fence where he might have been able to make a leaping catch of the ball, the Yuba right fielder now ran to the fence, picking up the ball on the warning track and firing it back to the infield.

The Eagles' runner on first, freshman right fielder Jaymin Graveman had reached base on a fielder's choice force at second on his grounder for the second out. He was running on contact when Garza sent his blast to right. Graveman had rounded third and was heading home when the throw from right was coming back to the infield. He crossed home plate standing up, scoring the winning run and the game coming to an end.

The Eagles' dugout exploded, with the players pouring out onto the field and running to mob Garza out by second base where he had pulled up with a double when the winning run scored.

Their celebration lasted for several minutes and the players still had big smiles on their faces when did their post-game field work and then gathered for the short post-game talk by Eagles head coach Conor Bird.

The win was the Eagles' second in a row, the team having won the prior 3-games series with Contra Costa on Saturday by winning the deciding third game 8-6 in 11 innings.

That win, plus Tuesday's win over Yuba improved the Eagles conference record to 7-12, lifting them into sixth place in the standings, one game behind Solano with two games left to play in the season.

More importantly, the two wins improved the Eagles' season record to 18-19-1. Wins in their final two games this week with Yuba would give the Eagles a 20-19-1 final record, the program's first winning season since 2013.

The two teams were scheduled to play game two of their series in Marysville on Thursday, then return to Ukiah on Friday for the final game of the series and both teams' final game of the season. Friday's game has been moved up from the original 2:30 p.m. start time to 1 p.m.

Had the Eagles not pulled out the come-from-behind, walk-off win on Tuesday, the remaining two game on the schedule would have lost much of their luster. It was a struggle, but the Eagles kept their hopes of a winning season alive.

Coming into the game Yuba had other ideas and certainly looked ready to play when the game began. In the



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top of the first, the 49ers jumped out to a 2-0 lead, combining a walk, two stolen bases, a single and a double into 2 runs.

The Eagles got one run back in the bottom of the first on a leadoff single by sophomore center fielder David Mansell. Mansell stole second, advanced to third on a single by freshman first baseman Jay Guerrero and scored on a fielder's choice.

The Eagles tied the game 2-2 in the second on a one-out single by sophomore shortstop Austin Jackson, Jackson advanced on a wild pickoff throw and then a ground out to the second. He scored on a two-out hit by sophomore second baseman Dylan Lancaster.

But Yuba retook the lead in the top of third, on a walk, a stolen base and three base hits that produced 2 runs. They added an unearned run in the fourth on an infield error and then a wild pitch.

The 49ers made it a 6-2 lead in the fifth when the second batter of the inning, left fielder Eddy Cruz hit a long drive just fair down the left field line for a home run. The Eagles failed to score in the bottom of the inning, as they had in both the third and fourth.

Eagles freshman right-hander Jared Hibbeln, pitching his third inning in relief in the sixth, set the side down in order.

In the bottom of the inning, the Eagles scored their third run of the game, starting with a Garza leadoff single. He advanced to second on a balk and moved to third on a ground out. He scored on a long sacrifice fly to center by sophomore catcher Robbie McIntosh.

Hibbeln allowed only a leadoff single in the top of the seventh. The Eagles managed only a two-out single by Mansell in the bottom of the inning.

Hibbeln, in his fifth inning of work in the eighth, held the line, again yielding a leadoff single but retiring the next three batters.

Trailing 6-3, the Eagles, down to their final six outs of the game, needed to put up some runs when they batted in the bottom of the eighth.

Guerrero, always the patient hitter, worked a leadoff walk. A good start. Graveman also walked. Yuba made a pitching change, with Garza up next.

Garza took a first-pitch ball, fouled off a pitch, then took two more balls and a strike to run the count full. He lined the next pitch he saw into the right center gap, plating both runners, with Garza barely avoiding



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the tag at third on slide into the base for a triple.

Freshman Sam Penning who was the Eagles' starting pitcher, pitching three innings then switching to the DH, sent Garza home with a single into right field to tie the game 6-6.

A sacrifice bunt by McIntosh moved Penning into scoring position with the potential go-ahead run. Jackson was hit by a pitch to put two runners on. Freshman Cooper Gipp battled to a 2-2, count, fouled a pitch off, then ripped a line drive to left.

Unfortunately, the left fielder made a leaping backhanded catch to rob Gipp of a probable two-run double. A strikeout then stranded the two runners.

Freshman right-handed sidewinder Tyler Collins came in to pitch the top of the ninth with the game still tied. He struck out the first batter he faced on three pitches and then got the next two outs on fly balls to right.

In the bottom the ninth, the first batter was retired on strikes. Penning worked a walk, but was forced at second on a grounder to short for the second out.

The next batter was Garza. We already know the rest of the story.

For the game Garza had three hits, including the double and single and drove in a team-high 3 runs. Jackson also had 3 hits and scored a run. Mansell and Guerrero each had 2 hits and scored a run. Graveman didn't have a hit but did score two runs, including the winning run. When the Eagles took first, last and only lead of the game in the bottom of the ninth, it made Collins the winning pitcher.

After the game, Coach Bird reaffirmed the team's objective for two remaining games of the series and the Eagles' season. "We want to win 20 games. We want to finish 20-19-1."

Aside from the late game-offense, the Eagles needed and got some stout pitching from Hibbeln and Collins that made the Eagles the Eagles late run possible. Bird noted that "Hibbeln gave up that home run and an unearned run. But he threw the ball great. He saved our bullpen today. I'm optimistic about him for him moving forward. He can get better. He just needs to pitch." As for Collins, Bird affirmed, "That's our closer."