

## Loggers claim sole possession of Big 5 baseball title

Ray Aspuria/The Times-Standard

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CUTTEN -- Excellent defense in the opener and game altering plays by Brandon Vitale and Tyler Plummer in the nightcap allowed the Eureka High baseball squad to become Big 5 champions once again and remain undefeated in conference play on Saturday.

The Loggers claimed the conference crown after Ryan Stearns and company shut down the Arcata Tigers 3-0 in game one and Vitale's bomb and Plummer's game-winning single in the bottom of the seventh gave the Loggers a nail-biting 8-7 victory in game two.

Eureka sits alone atop the Big 5 food chain as champions after sharing the title with both Arcata and McKinleyville last year.

With title in hand, Eureka head coach Matt Pidgeon wasn't concerned whether his team would loosen the belt and take the rest of the season lightly.

"This group of guys, they like to go after it," he said. "You don't have to do much to motivate them."

The Loggers didn't appear to be as hungry in the nightcap early on.

Taking a quick 2-0 lead, Arcata was on the move early playing crisp ball while Eureka was trying to get its bearings.

To be fair, the Loggers employed more backup players in the nightcap.

However, Vitale would swing things in Eureka's favor in a hurry in the bottom half of the first inning, blasting a Ryan Thompson offering over the left-center fence for a two-run homer, giving the Loggers a 3-2 advantage.

"The ball was a little outside, but it was good enough," Vitale said about the pitch.

Eureka's defense and offense combined to create a 7-2 advantage heading into the sixth inning. That's when Arcata livened things up a bit.

Mitch Provolt, D.J. Hanock and crew cranked out the ribbies to cut the gap to 7-5 heading into the final inning.

With Jordan Lugue in to relieve Justin Hatch, Eureka looked to slam the door shut, but the Tigers were there to bust it open.

Taking advantage of walks, errors and mental mistakes, the Tigers were able to load the bases and Alex Cuhna was able to bring in the tying runs with a single. But Arcata's momentum would be cut at the knees when Cuhna was picked off at first and Andrew Nelson popped out to end the inning.

It was Eureka's turn to answer and Jordan Davis ripped a shot up the middle for a single. A strikeout, two wild pitches later and a walk left runners on for Plummer. Ripping a shot into left field, the Loggers completed their sweep of the Tigers.

"Oh yeah, I felt it off the bat, it felt real good," Plummer said after the game.

Eureka improves to 11-0 in Big 5 play while Arcata dropped to 8-4.

"We had opportunities to do things," Arcata boss Troy Ghisetti said. "We didn't come up with a clutch hit when it counted. Subsequently their champs and we're in second."