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SEAN SPERRY/CHRONICLE

Kyle Britt throws to first after forcing out Ty Gilmore for a double-play against the Billings Scarlets on Wednesday.

'Doing work'

Bucks hand Scarlets first conference loss

By **WILL C. HOLDEN**
Chronicle Sports Writer

It had to happen some time.

That's what Billings Scarlets shortstop Aleksei Grouslak said of his team's first conference loss of the year.

And it wasn't any consolation that it came in the Montana State football recruit's future home.

"No one likes to lose," Grouslak said plainly of his team's 5-4 loss to the Bozeman Bucks Wednesday.

Bucks head coach Mitch Messer said he doesn't much care if his conference wins come against "the Belgrade Bandits or the Billings Scarlets."

His team echoed his sentiments.

"It depends on how we play the game," center fielder Ethan Wilkes said. "It doesn't matter who the other team is. If we play well, we can beat a lot of really good teams."

"This past weekend we challenged some guys to step up instead of relying on the same old."

— **Mitch Messer**, Bucks coach

But Wilkes did finally say a win over the Scarlets (24-6, 10-1) is maybe a tad bit special. "It feels great," Wilkes said. "I'll admit that."

It felt equally great for Wilkes, mired in an 0-for-15 slump and relegated from the leadoff spot to ninth in the Bozeman (25-12, 10-2) order, to break through with a hit in the bottom of the seventh that drove in the tying run and eventually allowed him to score the winning run himself.

"I've just seen it as a little slump," Wilkes said. "Coach Mess always says the big players get big hits, so that's what I was trying to do.

And it happened. I think that's going to get me rolling again."

The leadoff triple that put Wilkes in position to be the hero came from another Buck who has had his offensive issues this season — third baseman and closer Jamin Weidenaar.

Weidenaar blasted a three-bagger off the fence in center field and was driven in several pitches later by a Wilkes double to tie the game at four.

Anthony Rinard then drove in Wilkes with a single to put the Bucks up for good.

"This past weekend we challenged some guys to step up instead of relying on the same old," Messer said, referring to his team's 3-2 performance against what Messer called "quality competition" in the Palouse Series Tournament in Pullman, Wash. "That's exactly what happened last weekend and it carried over tonight. Guys stepped up and got it done."

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But none of it would have been made possible without the performances of the Bucks' pitchers. Starter Andrew Abate went 6 1/3 innings, allowing four runs on seven hits while striking out six.

The one rough patch he ran into came in the third. With two outs, Abate walked the bases full. The free passes to leadoff man Justin Black and his pitching counterpart Ty Gilmore were the most painful, though.

Abate lost Black after getting him down 0-2 and Bucks catcher Andy Ballinger dropped what would have been a third strike on Gilmore. Abate walked him one pitch later.

Then he left a fastball up to Grousulak and the senior pounded a double to left to clear the bases.

"(Abate) made one mistake and Aleksei pounded it," Messer said. "Other than that he threw a



SEAN SPERRY/CHRONICLE

Brendan Phillips, right, dives safely back to first in the third inning against the Billings Scarlets, Wednesday.

heck of a game."

Messer then handed the ball to Weidenaar with runners on second and third and one out in the seventh. Nine Scarlet batters later the game was over.

It's just part of upholding his name and doing the three brothers

who came before him proud, the freshman said.

"I think I'm on my way," said Weidenaar, who struck out three Scarlets. "Just doing work."

The Bucks face the Las Vegas Lions in a non-conference game tonight before heading to the UAS Shootout Tournament at Billings over the weekend.

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Bucks 5, Scarlets 4

Scarlets 000 030 100 — 4 8 2
Bucks 000 210 200 — 5 7 0

Ty Gilmore, Brady Muller (5) and Tyson Shriver. Andrew Abate, Jamin Weidenaar (8) and Andy Ballinger.

Scarlets (25-5, 10-1) — Justin Black 2-3, Gilmore 2-4, Aleksei Grousulak 1-4, Jordan Roberts 0-4, Shriver 0-4, Kyle Miron 1-4, Cole Moller 0-4, Justin MacDonald 0-1, Brandon Endy 0-1, Jake Dukart 1-2, Muller 1-2.

Bucks (25-12, 10-2) — Brendan Phillips 1-4, Kyle Britt 0-5, Caleb Schlender 0-2, Anthony Rinard 2-4, Ballinger 1-3, Dillon Peterson 0-3, Ben Leister 0-3, Weidenaar 2-3, Ethan Wilkes 1-4.

2B: Gilmore, Grousulak, Ballinger. **3B:** Weidenaar. **RBI:** Grousulak 3, Gilmore, Schlender, Rinard, Ballinger, Weidenaar, Wilkes.