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WINCHESTER — Of all the ways to end a softball game, a failed attempt to steal home isn't the most common.

Nonetheless, with two outs and Golden Bears on the corners, Winchester catcher Ava Lanter popped up to throw Zoie Hood out at second base. Jayme Brannon, the Monroe Central catcher at third, darted for the plate, only to find Lanter threw to her pitcher, Alyssa Cole, instead. When Cole tossed the ball back to Ganter with seconds to spare, Brannon couldn't find the base in time, and the sealing tag was applied. The Falcons outsmarted the double steal to end their season opener with an 8-5 home win over Monroe Central.

"We knew the double steal was probably coming, so (coach Monte) Gaddis wanted me to sell the throw to second," Ganter said. "I knew I had to throw it hard, but was worried I'd throw it high."

The win came after a back-and-forth, streaky six innings. The Falcons scored in bunches, having four of their eight runs come in the fourth inning, and three more in the sixth. The Golden Bears were able to hang on, even ahead after the first three frames, but Winchester broke away after a two-run double from Lanter to extend their lead to four.

Not only did Lanter have three RBIs on the day and the game-sealing play, she did so in her first career high school game, batting cleanup for the Falcons.

"To be honest, we had even higher expectations for her today," Gaddis said. "She's going to be an amazing contributor to this program, and our expectations for her are really high."

Cassidi Ruble got the first start for the Falcons. In six innings on the circle, she allowed four runs on six hits, while striking out three Golden Bears and walking one more before Alyssa Cole came in to close the show. On the bats, however, Ruble went 0-3.

For Monroe Central, Aleiya Davis got the nod. In six innings pitched, she struggled, giving up eight runs on 10 hits, only striking out one without any walks.

Her success with the plate was more common as a batter. As the leadoff hitter, she went 3-4 with a double off an error and a leadoff triple in the top of the seventh inning. She also stole a bag in the top of the third, and found home on three different occasions.

"Making big splash plays will always make the team happy, and that makes me happy in turn," Davis said. "We build off of each other."

The temperature at first pitch was 34 degrees, and with that number only dropping as the game progressed, it became a catalyst of early-season miscues. Both teams had multiple costly errors; Winchester had four, and Monroe Central had

two of their own.

“The cold takes away some of the concentration,” Gaddis said. “If you’re having a good game, it’s more difficult to notice, but as soon as you make one mistake, it becomes amplified. I’m proud of my players for responding to that adversity.”

Even with a loss, the Golden Bears see it as an opportunity to grow.

“We have a really young squad this year,” head coach Robert McGrath said. “We know there will be growing pains, but we have to cut down on errors, and the rest will work itself out.”

The Falcons will enjoy the home win before their first road tests of the year in South Adams on Thursday before a doubleheader at Southern Wells on Saturday. The Golden Bears will seek to find their first win at Union City on Wednesday before traveling to Bluffton High School on Thursday.