

Wildcat football hoping for big season after missing playoffs



Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford returns as the Wildcat signal caller for his junior season after he earned second team All-Frontier League honors a season ago. The Wildcats finished 6-3 a year ago and are hoping for a big season as they return 16 starters.

The Louisburg High School football team had its fair share of successes last season as it finished with six wins under then first-year coach Robert Ebenstein.

As nice as it was, that season has bugged Ebenstein and his players the entire offseason. The Wildcats missed the playoffs by just one game and saw their campaign end in a loss to their rival, Paola.

The Wildcats have used the ending as motivation all offseason to get better. There is no mistake this time around, as Louisburg will definitely have a spot in the playoffs under the new postseason format.

All the teams on each side of the state will be seeded into a bracket by record, which will determine the matchups, starting with week nine. The format eliminates district play, which took the top two teams in each district into the playoffs.

"Honestly, 6-3 and missing the playoffs was a brutal end to the season, but our motivation is much more than just playoffs," Ebenstein said. "With the new playoff format we are looking to make a statement and that drive has to come from within and has to be present every day of weights, practice, and game days."

Games haven't started yet, but the Wildcat players have put in the work over the summer and during practice and are ready to make some noise. Louisburg returns 16 starters and also has an 18-member senior class.

That experience has given the Wildcats high expectations for themselves as they figure to be one of the favorites to win the Frontier League that includes three new teams in Tonganoxie, Piper and Bonner Springs.

"We want to win every game on our schedule and go 8-0 and we think have a chance to do that," senior captain Austin Moore said. "It is going to be a challenge, but we have been working hard. We want to win the league and then see where we get put in the playoffs. We are excited to get going."

Offensively, Louisburg had its highs and lows last season as it ran a new offense, but the Wildcats have since put those challenges behind them as they return eight starters and hope to take it to another level.

It starts with running back Austin Moore, who was a first team All-Frontier League selection a year ago after he recorded 1,200 yards on the ground to go along with 15 touchdowns. Seniors Blue Caplinger and Brayden Gage also figured to get touches at the running back spot.

"I think Austin has the potential to have a huge year," Ebenstein said. "Off a 1,200-plus yard season last year and returning four offensive lineman, I think all of our running backs have the ability to get huge chunks every time they touch the ball."

The offensive line will be key for the Wildcats as senior Kiefer Tucker leads the group after earning honorable mention all-league honors a season ago. Senior Noah Larson returns at center, while juniors Brayden White and Garrett Harding all hope to have big years on the line.



Louisburg junior Brayden White is one of four returning starters on the Wildcat offensive line.

Louisburg does have to replace Garrett Lowry's spot a tackle from last year and it is a big hole to fill as Lowry was a first team all-league selection. Seniors Jonathan DePriest and Hunter Day, along with James Nelson and Cole Williams are all competing for the final spot.

At tight end, the Wildcats have three players competing to help out the offensive line in Michael Waldron, Eli Johnson and Andy Hupp. Josh Casey, Weston Guetterman, Beckett

Rasmussen, Gabe Rader and Konnor Vohs all figure to see time at wide receiver.

Leading the offense will be second-year quarterback Madden Rutherford. The Louisburg junior, who was a second team all-league player, got a lot of experience guiding the Wildcats last season and Ebenstein has seen a lot out of his signal caller so far.

“Madden is in a position to have a breakout year,” Ebenstein said. “Last year we tried to hide him a bit as a runner to let him get comfortable in that role on Friday night and to protect him from taking hits, but if you watched him grow last season he is a tough kid and runs hard.

“He is also extremely smart, almost to the point where he drives me crazy. When I am thinking through something he usually fixes it for me before the words come out of my mouth. His understanding of this offense makes my job calling plays a lot easier.”



(From left): Austin Moore, Noah Larson and Kiefer Tucker team up on a tackle last season.

On defense, Moore is the quarterback of that group at middle linebacker as he returns to lead the eight starters on that side of the ball. Moore racked up 70 tackles last season to go along with five sacks and two forced fumbles.

It is a defense that Moore takes a lot of pride in and he believes it can be a strength this season.

"I think the defense will be strong as usual, and I think it will be stronger than last year because we are bringing back so many people," Moore said. "I know the linebackers are going to be young, but (Jorge) LeBron is going to step up and Hupp is going to be there too and he is a really good player. It will be a good defense."

The Wildcats returns three starting linemen in Tucker, Larson

and Harding. Tucker was a second team all-league defensive player last year and Larson was an honorable mention.

DePriest, White, Day, Brian Houck, James Foote and Johnson are all vying for playing time on the defensive line as well.

Louisburg is young, experience-wise, at linebacker alongside Moore. Hupp, LeBron, along with Ben Wiedenmann, Dylan Knipp and Jay Scollin are all competing for the other spots.

Caplinger and Gage bring a lot of experience to the secondary as both were honorable mention all-league players last season. Waldron, Rasmussen, Rader, Guetterman, Brandon Cooper and Tanner Belcher also figure to see playing time in the back of the defense.

As much talent as the Wildcats have returning, it is their willingness to work hard that has Ebenstein excited about the season more than anything.

"I think our strength as a team is our stubborn hard-nosed attitudes," Ebenstein said. "We have a lot of kids who are just football guys. It's something you can't really explain, but when you watch them play they just get it. As coaches, if we skip dirty chutes and dig drill, the kids are asking what is going on because they look forward to those physical drills where 'football guys' shine.

"Another strength of this team is how the kids and coaches truly enjoy each other's company. I have been a part of others where when practice ends it's almost a race of who can get off the field the fastest. With this group, practice ends and it almost seems that kids and coaches just linger around and keep playing catch, having kicking contests or whatever it may be on that day."

The season is almost upon them as Louisburg will host Spring Hill at 7 p.m., Friday at Wildcat Stadium as they hope it is a start to what is a special year.

"I'm really excited for Friday," Moore said. "We have all been waiting for this day for a long time. We will be ready."