

# Girls soccer team prepares for season



Louisburg's Bailey Belcher (left) and Rylee Bergh battle for a 50-50 ball during the Lady Cats' team camp Friday at Louisburg High School. The girls soccer team has been working together since June 1 to prepare for its inaugural season in the spring.

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This wasn't just an ordinary team camp – it was a little more unique.

Last week's camp marked the first official team activity for the Louisburg High School girls soccer team as the Lady Cats took their first step in the program's infancy. Approximately 24 attended the team camp throughout the week as they begin to build their program.

"It doesn't feel real yet," senior Maddie McDaniel said. "It just feels like we are a bunch of girls getting together for a scrimmage or something. It is a weird feeling, but it has been good."

The challenge of building a new a program falls on the shoulders of head coach Kyle Conley as he tries to mold this group of players into a team. He got off to a good start last week as he got a better look at his group.

The Lady Cats have been holding practices since June 1, but Conley was able to work with his team on a more consistent basis last week and he liked what he saw.

“Things went good,” Conley said. “We have been practicing since the beginning of June and there has been a lot of improvement. There are a lot of kids that haven’t played in years or haven’t played at all. The improvement from day one till now is vast. The girls are really working hard right now. We have great numbers, the kids are here, sticking with it and doing what we ask them to do.”

Conley is no stranger to the game of soccer, in fact, the Pennsylvania native has played the game at a high level for most of his life. He attended Ottawa University and started all four years and was also named to the school’s all-decade team.

He also travels to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, to help with a camp and helps out with another at Messiah College in his former home state.



**Louisburg girls soccer coach Kyle Conley gives instructions to his team Friday during the Lady Cats' team camp.**

However, starting a high school soccer program has been a little change of pace for Conley, but one he has embraced.

“It has been different,” Conley said. “When you start a program you are dealing with a whole spectrum of athletes, whether they are experienced players or ones that haven’t played before. Dealing with that spectrum is different for me because the camps I do in the summer and the kids I work with are usually at a certain level.

“It is making me step back and change how I teach to ensure that I am getting every kid the improvement they did and to challenge even the better kids. It has been fun and relaxing so far. It hasn’t been stressful yet, which is a good thing I guess.”

Several of the players have already learned a lot from their new coach, including two of the senior leaders in McDaniel and Rylee Bergh. Conley has made the transition from club to high school soccer a smooth one for those two girls in particular.

“It went a lot better than I expected,” Bergh said. “I really like how Conley is coaching this team. The best team I was ever on is when we played as a team and not an individual person. He is creating a team and he is making every individual person better. I saw girls at the beginning of the week who couldn’t get a good touch on the ball, and now they are getting good touches.”

Conley is joined by assistant coach Michael Pickman, who also played at Ottawa for four years. The two coaches bring the same philosophies to the table and has given the players a consistent message.

“A lot of these girls have never played together, so chemistry is always huge,” Conley said. “Just getting to know each other and figuring out their tendencies is big. I am always evaluating every time I see a kid. I go home after every practice and write notes on each kid. I even think about what

the lineup might look like even though we are still nine months away from the season.”

“I just wanted to use this camp to get to know each girl and for them to get to know me and coach Pickman. I think we accomplished that for the most part.”

The Lady Cat program was started with the help of the Louisburg Soccer Club and other individuals and businesses in and around Louisburg. In just a year’s time, they were able to raise the \$39,000 needed to fully fund the program for three years.

Conley fully sees the passion for girls soccer in Louisburg and is excited to be a part of it.

“It is a fantastic opportunity,” he said. “The individuals involved who raised all this money to make this opportunity to be available for the girls is just unbelievable. It is going to be fun for me. My expectations are going to be extremely high and we are going to push ourselves. It is going to be pretty special.”

Although the first practice is still nine months away, the Lady Cats are already well on their way to becoming a team.

“It has been exciting,” McDaniel said. “It has been a little rough at times but it is fun playing with these girls. They are getting better. It is very cool to see this team come together.”