

Wildcats' special season comes to a close



Louisburg senior Rylee Bergh tries to beat a De Soto defender for a 50-50 ball during the Wildcats' state quarterfinal match May 24 in Louisburg. The Wildcats came up short against De Soto in a 3-1 loss, but finished their season with a 14-4-1 record.

Following the final buzzer, this year's version of the Louisburg High School girls soccer team huddled together for the final time.

Some players had tears in their eyes, others left the field with their heads down. Their journey was over.

Their inaugural season was complete after a 3-1 loss to De Soto in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal round on May 24 in Louisburg. It wasn't the way they wanted to see their season come to a close.

"It is going to sting for a while," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "Ultimately, though, there is only one team that isn't crying at the end of the year."

De Soto, which split with Louisburg this season, came out on a mission and scored three goals in the first 25 minutes of the match and the Wildcats quickly found themselves in a big hole.

The Wildcats weren't the same team that beat De Soto two weeks

prior and it took them a little while to get into a rhythm.

“The first 20 minutes or so we just played scared,” Conley said. “Unfortunately, that 20 minutes determined the game. It stinks because we have played so hard and free all year. Maybe it is my fault for meeting with them before the game and talking with them more about this than any of the others, I don’t know. We just played nervous, afraid and played not to make mistakes instead of playing free.”



Georgia Wilde tries to console teammate Bailey Belcher (4) while Maddie McDaniel (right) tries to do the same to Madisen Simpson following the Wildcats’ loss on May 24 in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals.

With every De Soto goal, however, the Wildcats played a little looser and it finally ended up with a goal of their own.

A minute following De Soto’s third goal, Louisburg answered. Sophomore Bailey Belcher took a shot on goal – the shot bounced off the goalie and junior Lilly Cook was there for the rebound and cut the De Soto lead to 3-1.

The Wildcats had a couple other shots on goal late in the first half to creep even closer, but couldn't find the back of the net.

"After that first 20 minutes it was a back and forth game," Conley said. "It really wasn't dominated by either team. It wasn't pretty soccer, but it was what it was and almost got another one at the end of the half and would have made the second half much different.



Senior Lilly Scott clears the ball away from a De Soto player on May 24 in Louisburg.

"We just had some mistakes early when they scored and there was no cover help like we have been preaching the last couple weeks. We weren't as united as we have been in the back. You will have games like that throughout the year, but when you have a game like that against De Soto, you have to play well to beat them and unfortunately those things came back and got us."

The loss also meant the team had to say goodbye to its three seniors. Midfielders Maddie McDaniel and Lilly Scott, along with defender Rylee Bergh as all three suited up for the Wildcats for the final time. The team also said farewell to

manager Leslie Damian.

“Losing our three seniors is going to be difficult to replace,” Conley said. “They are good kids who work their butts off and leadership wise other kids are going to follow what they do. They don’t have to lead by voice that often, they lead by example and that is the best kind. It is great to have a vocal leader, but if you can lead by example and be that example every time, it just sets the tone for everyone else.

“Maddie had a nagging ankle injury for half the season and Lilly has had quad problems the last three weeks. There isn’t any fussing and not a lot of whining, it is just working hard and doing their job and carrying the team. They busted their butts and never played soft. Rylee kept us in a lot of games in the back and was just all over the place. Maddie got a lot of assists and Lilly helped distribute the ball out of the back which is huge. A lot of the times she was the girl before the assist and that opened up a lot of things. They all did very well academically and are going to further their education. Leslie was awesome too being the manager and team mom. When Mama Leslie talked, the team listened.”

The Wildcats shattered everyone’s expectations for the first-year program as it racked up a 14-4-1 record and captured a regional title. It was a special season for everyone involved and increased interest in girls soccer in Louisburg.

There were no baby steps in the program’s infancy. Instead, the Wildcats took one big giant step forward and are ready to get off the ground and take another one after a little stumble.

Still, the Wildcats know putting together a season like this one could be difficult to duplicate.

“I don’t know if a season like this is going to be repeated because it is going to be tough to do,” Conley said. “With 4A

what it is, and the team's you run into at regionals, it is tough to accomplish what these girls have done. We aren't going to sneak up on anyone now. They are going to look at the schedule and say 'Oh, look there is Louisburg, a first-year team.' There were some teams that didn't take us very seriously and we outworked them. That is not going to happen next year."