

Wildcats ready to defend regional title with new coach



Noah Juarez (right) looks up the field during the team's annual scrimmage Friday. Juarez is one of several returning players returning from last season's regional championship team and was named captain with fellow senior Kolten Ragan (background) and junior Grant Ryals.

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team caught fire at the right time last season.

After recording just four wins during the regular season, the Wildcats reeled off three straight victories to capture the program's sixth regional title and a spot in the state quarterfinals.

That may have been nine months ago, but Louisburg hopes it can use some of the momentum and confidence to get off to a good start in 2016.

"I would think the boys should have some excitement in regards to winning a regional title from last year," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "That should give them some confidence with their abilities and success always promotes a positive attitude."

Conley is excited to get going himself as he is in his first season with the Wildcats after taking over for Ben York, who

served as head coach for 13 years. In the spring, Conley led the girls' soccer team to a regional title in the program's first year and hopes the boys can experience similar success.

There has been a transition period, but the players are getting to used what Conley expects and a different style of play.

"Practice has been going well," Conley said. "According to the boys what we are doing is vastly different than they are use too, but that is to be expected with a new coach. The boys have great attitudes and work ethic and in that regard I couldn't ask for anything else from them.

"I appreciate the fact that they do not make excuses and try to play the way we want them too. I am very excited to see how this team does. I wish I had another week of practice, like every other coach, but I am very excited to see this team compete."

The Wildcats have a strong core returning from last season's squad and it starts with senior Noah Juarez. The Louisburg midfielder is a three-time all-state and all-Frontier League player and will provide stability in the middle of the field.



Scott Murphy heads the ball away from teammate Chris Williams Friday during the

team's annual scrimmage.

Juarez was named team captain, along with fellow senior Kolten Ragan and junior Grant Ryals. Junior Christian Scholtz and Ryals will join Juarez in the midfield, which is one of the team's strengths heading to the season.

Juarez returns as the team's leading scorer as he recorded 11 goals a season ago to go along with nine assists.

"Noah is a quality player and even a better young man," Conley said, "He has a great skill set, but I know he can get even better. So we are going to challenge him to take his game to another level this year. I then expect for his teammates to also pick up their individual game up to try to make his intensity better.

"I envision this year being kind of the icing on the cake to close out Noah's senior year. I feel this year will give him the opportunity to open a lot of doors collegiately. My expectation for him is to push himself to better his game, but also make his teammates better around him."

There has been a lot of competition at some of the other spots so far this season as juniors Raistlin Brewer and David Holiday, along with sophomores Jacob Andersen, Eric Vazquez and freshman Landon Johnson are all competing for spots in the midfield.

Senior Herman Knipp and sophomore Jonathan Ventre will see a lot of time at the forward spot.

However, the position on the field with the most questions for the Wildcats is on defense. Louisburg lost almost its entire starting defense from a season ago and Conley is looking for some new players to step up.

Seniors Jacob Benne, Curran Conklin, Ty Martin, Calvin Cassida, Ragan, along with juniors Kris Light and Scott Murphy

will all see playing time in the back. Junior Ambrose Stefan will also begin the season as the team's goalie.

"Defense is a very interesting aspect to our team," Conley said. "We have about six to eight guys who could play four to five spots depending on our formation. These players are also very similar type players. So it is going to come down to (today) for us to determine starters and to be quite honest, it will be something that will/could change each game. We have several guys with some varsity experience so that helps, but graduating almost our entire defense last year is going to be tough to replace. As of now, Ambrose is going to be our starting varsity goalkeeper. He has beat out the other two goalkeepers and has been the most consistent throughout our preseason."

Like most other seasons, the schedule will be a difficult one for Louisburg. The Frontier League provides several challenges, including teams like De Soto and Baldwin, who have made deep runs in the playoffs in the last few seasons.

"As I think everyone already knows, we play in a ridiculously difficult league," Conley said. "My goal is to make sure we are always prepared, focused, ready to compete and never get outworked in a game. I think we have the skill sets to be a driving force in league this year, but it is going to be very difficult. I feel the boys' league record from last year is also some motivation for this season because they know they are better than that."

Louisburg opens its season Tuesday when it travels to Fort Scott. Varsity is scheduled to begin at 4 p.m. The Wildcats' home opener is set for 4 p.m. on Thursday against Ottawa.