

Wildcats ready for redemption after playoff defeat



Louisburg senior running back Jake Hill (left) tries to get away from fellow senior Owen Staver during the Wildcats' scrimmage last Friday at Wildcat Stadium. The Wildcats open their season Friday when they travel to Wyandotte.

The sting of last season's first round playoff loss continues to hang around the Louisburg High School football team.

The Wildcats players felt it over the summer and all the way through the first couple weeks of practice. They welcome it, however, as they are using it as motivation for what the Wildcats hope is a special season.

It won't be easy as Louisburg faces a tough schedule, including a rough gauntlet through the Frontier League. Still, they aren't backing down from the challenge.

"We have very high expectations for this season," co-head coach Jeff Lohse said. "As always, the Frontier League will be an extremely tough, physical league. We are going to continue to work hard every day and take it game by game."

Louisburg has the experience to handle what its nine-game schedule holds as it returns seven starters on offense and eight on defense from a team that finished 7-2 in the regular season last year.

Offensively, senior Grant Harding takes over the quarterback spot after serving as the backup last season and did see time as a starter his sophomore campaign.

Senior Thomas San Agustin, a second-team all-Frontier League player a season ago, is also one of the team's starting running backs. Fellow seniors Korbin Hankinson, Jake Hill, Nick Hull, along with junior Will Ridley and sophomore Austin Moore will also see a fair share of snaps in the backfield at times this year.

Wide receivers Desmond Doles, Christian Tosterud, Connor Green and Jackson Ewalt will give Harding options to throw to, while Ben Hupp and Dalton Ribordy will help on the offensive line at the tight end position.

The Wildcat offense will be led by co-head coach Gary Griffin.

"I think our experience should be the strength of the team," Griffin said. "Grant has played quite a bit of quarterback, especially as a sophomore, but he has played a lot for three years at other positions. We have five running backs with starting experience and probably the only positions with inexperience is at wide receiver and tight end, but we have some talented kids there as well."



The Louisburg football team huddles together before last week's scrimmage

The most talented part of the offense could be the Wildcat offensive line as they return three all-league players from a year ago. Senior Dustyn Rizzo earned second-team honors, while fellow senior T.J. Dover and Mason Koechner were honorable mentions.

Junior Garrett Lowry returns after starting last season, while Dalton Frazier, Matthew Rison and Kiefer Tucker are all battling to take the center spot.

"We have four starters back on the offensive line and they have a great understanding of what we are trying to do," Griffin said. "We are going to rely on them. They are a big, strong and tough group that is pretty athletic, so there is a lot of stuff we ought to be able to do."

Rizzo will also help anchor the Wildcat defense as he is a returning first-team all-league player on the defensive line. He led the Wildcat defensive line with 49 tackles, including

eight for a loss. He also had five sacks, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery.

Koechner and Dover, who were honorable mentions all-league on defense as well last season, will join Rizzo on the line.

Moore, San Agustin and Hull are the team's starting linebackers, while Harding, Hankinson and Hill will man the secondary. A spot on the defensive line and at cornerback are still up for grabs heading into this week's opener.

"Our defense has the potential to be really good this year," Lohse said, who will run the defense. "We return eight starters from last season and many other guys who have gotten a lot of reps. Our team speed and experience are going to be huge factors for us this year. We have the luxury of having a lot of quality backups at many positions to help with our depth."

Experience will be key for the Wildcats as they return 16 seniors this year and it has already shown their leadership on and off the field.

"Practices have been going extremely well," Lohse said. "The seniors have been doing a great job of leading and this was evident from day one in the weight room this summer."

The Wildcats will hit the field for the first time this season when they travel to Wyandotte High School at 7 p.m. Friday. Louisburg will host Piper for its home opener on Sept. 9.