

Louisburg ties state-ranked Spring Hill



Louisburg senior defender Curran Conklin clears the ball away from the Wildcat goal Monday during the Wildcats' match with Spring Hill in Louisburg. The Wildcats tied state-ranked Spring Hill 1-1.

A tie wasn't the result Louisburg was looking for during Monday's home match with Spring Hill.

However, the Wildcats didn't leave the field with their heads down – in fact – it was the exact opposite. Louisburg pushed No. 4 Spring Hill to the limits, and after two overtime periods, the two teams ended in a 1-1 tie.

It was a big step forward for the Wildcats (10-4-1) that lost to the same Spring Hill team 3-0 earlier in the season.

"It was a 50-50 game," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "I think we had as many opportunities as they did, and in overtime we had much better looks. We just couldn't finish them. It was a heck of an effort. The kids played hard, didn't give up and just fought through everything. They just kept grinding and fighting and you really can't be more proud of a team."

The Wildcats did face some adversity as they found themselves down a goal early in the second half when the Broncos scored

off a rebound. That didn't seem to bother the Wildcats more, in fact, they turned up the intensity and provided themselves with a good look at the goal.

Senior Herman Knipp crossed the ball to freshman Landon Johnson, who was open on the back side, and Johnson found the back of the net to tie the match with 15 minutes left in regulation.



Landon Johnson celebrates his game-tying goal with teammates Grant Ryals (on back) and Herman Knipp on Monday in Louisburg.

"Landon showed a lot of composure compared to a coach who was yelling at him to 'Shoot, shoot , shoot' about 15 times," Conley said. "He had a ton of composure to slot it and find where it needed to be. It was cool to see a kid play above his level a little bit. We knew that back side was open, and when we finally got it there, he was able to slot it in."

"It was cool for him and a great moment for our team. It shows the will and determination that we have that we fought even harder after we gave up the lead."

Prior to that, the Wildcats had several shots on goal, but were either saved or were just wide of the goal. Early in the second half, senior Noah Juarez played a ball to Johnson in the box but couldn't convert on the shot.

Sophomore Jonathan Ventre had a shot saved on a breakaway opportunity and junior Grant Ryals also sent the ball into the box as diving Juarez tried to head the ball in, but to no avail. Juarez also had another opportunity to score late in the second half, but was thwarted by the Spring Hill defense.

Louisburg also turned up its defense as junior goalie Ambrose Stefan turned away three Spring Hill shots on goal in the final minutes.

"Ambrose made several great saves out there," Conley said. "The goal that he gave up he knew he should have smothered, but he more than made up for the four or five saves that were just ridiculous. He played really hard and kept us in it to be quite honest. Without a couple of those saves it could be a 3-1 game instead of a tie."

The Wildcats also received vital performances from its outside backs of seniors Jacob Benne and Curran Conklin. Both players had to deal with a persistent Spring Hill attack and help limited the Broncos' chances as well.

"Jacob and Curran were fantastic," Conley said. "Spring Hill just kept coming at them and those two just held their ground. They were able to stand their man up every time. The outside backs were just phenomenal out there. I don't call out players or isolate groups very often, but those two young men did their job and kept us to where we had an opportunity to be in the game. I couldn't be prouder of them."

Drama continued into the overtime as the Wildcats had good looks at the goal. Louisburg appeared to have a great opportunity in the opening minutes of the first overtime as Ryals played the ball to Juarez in the box and had a one-on-one with the goal but couldn't convert the shot.

Both teams each had more opportunities in the extra periods, but both team's defenses didn't break and the Wildcats walked off their home field with a tie against a state-ranked team and an undefeated home record.

"It was two teams just leaving it all out there and it was awesome," Conley said. "It came down to a war of attrition there for a while and I was beginning to wonder how we were going to hold up. The kids didn't give up and they weren't going to get outworked. We made a goal at the beginning of the year to go undefeated at home and this solidified that. Both teams played really hard."

Louisburg will travel to Ottawa tonight for its final regular season game before the Wildcats prepare for the postseason. The junior varsity will begin at 4:30 p.m., with the varsity to follow.