

Ryals' golden goal puts Wildcats in regional title game



Louisburg High School junior Grant Ryals celebrates his goal in the second overtime to give the Wildcats a 2-1 win over Baldwin on Tuesday in the regional semifinals in Louisburg. The Wildcats will travel to Coffeyville today for the 5 p.m. regional championship game.

Grant Ryals' face was full of grass and he had trouble breathing as his Louisburg teammates – one by one – dogpiled on him.

The thing was Ryals didn't care. In fact, he had never felt so good.

Just seconds earlier, Ryals scored the game-winning goal in double overtime as he helped the Wildcats to a 2-1 win over Baldwin on Tuesday in the Class 4A regional semifinals.

"I got a couple grass cuts on my face, but really I was just so happy that couldn't feel anything," Ryals said. "It was awesome."

Ryals took a touch just outside the box midway through the second overtime, made a defender miss and shot to the far post and found the back of the net. The Louisburg junior accounted

for both goals as he helped his team advance to the regional championship game.

“I was just praying it would go in,” Ryals said. “I knew I had good contact. I just aimed at the back post and I saw the goalie dive and I knew he wasn’t going to get there. I just started going crazy.”



Members of the Louisburg High School soccer team dogpile on teammate Grant Ryals after he scored the game-winning goal in the second overtime Tuesday in Louisburg.

The Wildcats (12-4-1) will go for their second consecutive regional title game at 5 p.m. today in Coffeyville as they face Field-Kindley High School – the same program they beat for the regional crown a year ago.

After an emotional win yesterday, Louisburg is going to have to gear up again for another tough game against No. 2 seed Field Kindley.

“We had a goal of going 9-7 this season and after we got past

that our goal was to get a regional championship," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "It is regional championship or bust. That is what we are going for. The quick turnaround is unfortunate, but we can't make any excuses. We have to suck it up and be ready to go. I know Coffeyville is going to want to get some payback for what happened last year. They will be ready and it will be a good challenge."

The biggest challenge for the Wildcats will be playing another 80 minutes after playing 90-plus minutes against a physical Baldwin team that pressured Louisburg, especially in the second half.

Louisburg had an opportunity to put some space between itself and the Bulldogs in the first half as it had several good looks at the goal, but couldn't convert. Senior Noah Juarez had two opportunities deep in the box only to have his shots saved.

Freshman Landon Johnson, junior Scott Murphy, junior Raistlin Brewer and sophomore Jonathan Ventre also had shots on goal, but those were either saved or just wide of the mark.

Ryals was able to take advantage of one of those opportunities as he scored to give Louisburg the lead in the 26th minute. Ryals took a shot just outside the box, which ricoched off a Baldwin defender, and he gathered up for another shot and snuck it past the Baldwin goalie.

The Wildcats didn't have as many chances in the second half as Baldwin pressured the Wildcat defense. The Bulldogs tied the match with just under 10 minutes left in regulation on a shot to the far post.

"It was unbelievable because we had so many chances," Conley said. "I think we just got a little comfort in that and they came at us with a counter attack. Baldwin didn't have a ton of chances to score, but they just had a good shot."



Louisburg junior Scott Murphy tries to win a 50-50 ball against a Baldwin player Tuesday.

Despite the goal, the Louisburg defense came up with several big plays, including several from junior Kris Light who turned away several Baldwin opportunities. Defenders Curran Conklin, Jacob Benne, Kolten Ragan, midfielder Scott Murphy, along with goalie Ambrose Stefan, also played a big role.

“Kris is really playing like a stud right now,” Conley said. “He is starting to put it together and feel comfortable. He is realizing that he is pretty good at what he is doing. The outside backs next to him just held their ground. Baldwin tried to go over the top but it didn’t work very often.

“We need to cover up a little more, but we did a good job of holding them to shots from 25 yards out and Ambrose did a good

job in goal.”

All that set up Ryals’ heroics in the second overtime as he, and the rest of his teammates, made sure to celebrate a goal that kept their season alive.

“If we would have lost I would have gone home and you wouldn’t have seen me for a week,” Ryals said. “Now we won, I scored two goals for my family (team) and we are playing in the regional championship. It is pretty awesome.”

All of his teammates and fans that packed the Wildcat Sports Complex couldn’t have agreed more.