

History in the making: Wildcats move on to state semis



Louisburg senior Herman Knipp celebrates his goal that gave the Wildcats a 1-0 win over Trinity Academy in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals Tuesday in Louisburg. The Wildcats advanced to the state semifinals for the first time in program history.

The state quarterfinal round has been nothing but heartbreak for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

In their previous six appearances, the Wildcats have seen their season come to an end and those players were left only to dream what playing in the state final four would be like.

There will be no imagining this time around.

Louisburg got a goal in the 75th minute from senior Herman Knipp to give the Wildcats a 1-0 victory over Trinity Academy on Tuesday in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg. The curse of the state quarterfinal round was finally lifted.

“It is exhilarating,” Knipp said. “It is a feeling that you can’t get anywhere else. It was amazing. This is opportunity that no one else has had. I just want to make the best out of going to state because we are the first to do it from

Louisburg. To see all the people and alumni from Louisburg who had smiles on their faces, it is just indescribable.”

It was a quarterfinal game that featured its fair share of drama, but none more than in the final eight minutes – and Knipp was right in the middle of it all.

The Louisburg forward was taken out from behind, near midfield with eight minutes left in the second half. The referee awarded the Trinity player a red card and the Knights were forced to play a man down the rest of the match.

Three minutes later, the mistake came back to haunt the Knights. A Trinity defender had possession at the top of the box, but Knipp sprinted from the sideline to put pressure on the play.

Knipp knocked the ball away from the defender the ball flipped into the air in the box and Knipp had a one-on-one with the goalie and put the shot away.

“They had to put a forward back in their defense and I don’t think he really knew what he was doing,” Knipp said. “He just held the ball for too long. I knew if I could put pressure on him I could get the ball and that is what really caused the goal was the pressure.”



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez slides into keep the ball away from three Trinity players Tuesday in Louisburg.

The goal sent the Louisburg sideline and fans into a frenzy as it was five minutes away from reaching its first state semifinal game.

“We were looking to counter the whole time,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We knew they were going to push hard and play that big ball. We just wanted to play our feet and try and counter and go at them. We kept getting chances and were getting close. I knew we were going to get one eventually.

“Trinity wasn’t tracking back near as much in the second half. I am not sure if they were fatigued or not, but we had way more run of play. Then the red card was just icing on the cake.”

However, had it not been for the Wildcat defense, Knipp’s goal

wouldn't have mattered as much. Trinity put pressure on the Louisburg back line early and often in the first half.

Trinity had four shots on goal in the first 20 minutes of action and had a good look at the goal with five minutes left before halftime. Junior goalie Ambrose Stefan turned away the shot with a diving save and also had a sliding stop to knock the ball away earlier in the half.



Louisburg goalie Ambrose Stefan slides in for one of his many saves Tuesday in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg.

Stefan had another diving save early in the second half to turn away another Trinity opportunity.

"I am really excited," Stefan said. "I don't usually show my emotions, but they are showing a lot right now. They had some good shots on us, but I just saw the ball and went and saved

it.”

The Louisburg head coach certainly liked what he saw from his defense, especially from his goalie.

“The first half they had such high pressure on us,” Conley said. “The game plan going in was to bend but don’t break and hold your ground. Ambrose made three unbelievable saves. One of them was point blank and he just extended out and knocked it away. That was probably the save of the year for him.”

Louisburg’s defense tightened up its play in the second half and limited the Knights’ chances on goal. Seniors Jacob Benne and Curran Conklin shut down the Trinity attack on the outside, while junior Kris Light and senior Kolten Ragan cleaned up the middle of the field.

“Kris cleaned up a bunch of messes and all four of those guys played unbelievable,” Conley said. “The outside backs Jacob and Curran just shut it down and Kolten in the second half came up huge. We changed the formation a little bit and moved him up so he could clean up their best player. That adjustment really seemed to get us going.”

The Wildcats had more chances on goal in the second half as freshman Landon Johnson had a shot save in the opening minutes. A few moments later, Conklin sent the ball into the box for Johnson, who hit it off the side of his foot, but was robbed of a goal by a diving save from the Trinity goalie.



Wildcat senior Calvin Cassida breaks away from the Trinity defense Tuesday.

Louisburg continued to put the pressure on the Knights, which eventually led to the red card late in the second half that sent Knipp to the ground.

"I was going after him and the ball, and I came in a little late, but not a whole lot," Knipp said. "Then I was running back and he kicked my leg out from under me and the ball was way gone. Luckily the AR saw it on my side and it was red card worthy."

The Wildcats will travel to Topeka on Friday for the Class 4-1A state tournament at Hummer Sports Park and the challenges get even more difficult from here on out.

Louisburg will face off with Bishop Miege at 7 p.m. Friday and will play again on Saturday. The championship match is set for

2 p.m., and the third place game is scheduled for noon.

The Wildcats obviously hope they are playing in the former.

“Hopefully when we come back to Louisburg, we can get some T-shirts that say we are state champions,” Stefan said.