

Louisburg beats rival Paola to earn playoff berth



Louisburg sophomore Austin Moore gets a block from his offensive line and breaks free for a long gain Friday in Paola. Moore rushed for 122 yards and four touchdowns in the 35-7 over Paola.

PAOLA – It had been five years since the Louisburg football team walked off the field and had anything to celebrate following a game with Paola.

The last five meetings with the Panthers, the Wildcats found themselves on the wrong side of the scoreboard. All that came to an end on Friday.

Louisburg had a lot to celebrate as it rolled Paola 35-7 at Panther Stadium in Paola. Not only did the Wildcats snap the losing streak to the Panthers, but they also earned a spot in the Class 4A, Division I playoffs.

After a loss to Ottawa the week before, the Wildcats had to win Friday to keep their season alive and they didn't leave much doubt from the opening kickoff.

"You beat Paola and make the playoffs in the same night – that is really big," Louisburg co-head coach Gary Griffin said. "These kids don't want to be done. They have more football in them and they are good bunch of kids. The coaches really like

being around them.”

Although the Wildcats had to win to get into the playoffs, the contest with Paola was considered a must-win before the season started. Former head coach Kyle Littrell stressed the importance of this game to his players throughout the summer and in practice.

Then when Littrell resigned his post shortly prior to the season, his players wanted to make sure they honored him on the field.

“It feels awesome,” senior lineman Mason Koechner said of the win. “Coach Littrell told us before the season started that even if we didn’t win a single game all year that he wanted us to win this game. I think we went out there and played the best game we could and we did it for him.”



Quarterback Grant Harding waits for a block from teammate

Jake Hill to get a few extra yards Friday in Paola.

Louisburg had it going in all phases of the game. The Wildcats racked up 429 yards of total offense and had five rushing touchdowns.

The Wildcat defense also held Paola to 227 yards, had two interceptions and had a shutout going until the final two minutes of the contest. Louisburg also converted on all five of its extra points from Nick Hull on special teams.

"This win feels really good for a lot of reasons," Griffin said. "That is the best game we have played for four quarters – offensively, defensively and on special teams. We stiffened and made some plays on the goal line and picked off a couple passes. That is what we have been waiting for this team to do this year. Offensively we were pretty efficient as well."

On a team dominated by seniors, it was sophomore Austin Moore who came through with the biggest performance of the night. Moore carried the ball 15 times for 122 yards and had four touchdowns.

Moore was also all over the field defensively as he led the Wildcats with eight tackles, including two for a loss and had an interception.

"Austin is a gamer," Griffin said. "He knows he didn't play very good against Ottawa and he wanted to come out and atone for it. You have to give those touchdowns to the offensive line. They opened some holes for him; he is a hard runner and he made some plays."



Seniors Dustyn Rizzo (left) and Mason Koechner team up for a tackle.

The offensive line of Koechner, Dustyn Rizzo, Dalton Frazier, T.J. Dover and Garrett Lowry paved the way for 283 yards on the ground and gave quarterback Grant Harding a lot of time to make some big pass plays down the field.

“The offensive line just made some really big holes, I read the blocks and it was all thanks to them,” Moore said. “I am thankful that I get another week with these seniors. I really enjoy playing with them all and happy that we can keep it going.”

Louisburg (7-2 overall, 2-1 district) made a statement early as the Wildcats drove down the field on the game’s first possession for a touchdown. The Wildcats faced a fourth-down-and-1 near midifield, they went for it and Moore broke free for a 29-yard run that set up a 4-yard touchdown run from

Thomas San Agustin.

Right before the end of the first quarter, Harding found Korbin Hankinson for a 65-yard pass that put Louisburg inside the 10-yard line. Moore then scored on a 4-yard touchdown to put Louisburg up 14-0.

Paola took its next possession down the field to try and answer. The Panthers faced a fourth down on the Louisburg 14-yard line, but Moore intercepted the Paola pass to stall the drive.

Moore then responded with a 43-yard run, Harding scrambled for 21 yards and eventually Moore scored on a 3-yard touchdown run to put Louisburg up 21-0 right before halftime.

Harding was a big part of the offense for the Wildcats as he tallied 146 yards through the air and 79 yards on the ground. Hankinson was other end of some of those passes as he caught five balls for 108 yards.

"It is awesome," Koechner said of the win. "We knew we were one and done and that we had to win this game. We had the best week of practice that we had all year. We were focused and came out and did it."

The Panthers used a little trickery to try and get back in the game to start the second half as they went for a fake punt near midfield and converted. Then as Paola looked toward the endzone with a long pass, Hankinson intercepted it to thwart another Panther drive.

Louisburg scored late in the third as Moore scored on a 4-yard run and then scored again on a 6-yard scamper to the endzone to put the Wildcats up 35-0 midway through the fourth quarter.

Now the Wildcats will focus their sights on the playoffs as they hit the road to face Independence at 7 p.m. Friday. Should the Wildcats advance, they will meet the winner between

Bishop Miege and Piper.

"If we improve as much next week as we did this week, then we will play a few games," Griffin said. "We just have to take them one game at a time."

LOU	7	14	7	7 – 35
PAO	0	0	0	7 – 7

First quarter

L: Thomas San Agustin 4 run (Nick Hull kick)

Second quarter

L: Austin Moore 4 run (Hull kick)

L: Moore 3 run (Hull kick)

Third quarter

L: Moore 4 run (Hull kick)

Fourth quarter

L: Moore 6 run (Hull kick)

P: Donovan Sutti 10 pass from Bryce Huber (kick good)

STATISTICS

OFFENSE

RUSHING – Austin Moore 15-122; Grant Harding 9-79; Thomas San Agustin 10-54; Jake Hill 4-16; Korbin Hankinson 2-8; Will Ridley 2-2; Owen Staver 1-2.

PASSING – Grant Harding 7-11-146

RECEIVING – Korbin Hankinson 5-108, Thomas San Agustin 2-38

DEFENSE

TACKLES – Austin Moore 8, Mason Koechner 6, Matt Rison 5, Thomas San Agustin 4, Dustyn Rizzo 4, Lyndon Smith 3, Connor Green 3, Jake Hill 3, T.J. Dover 3, Grant Harding 2, Nick Hull 2, Ben Hupp 2, Kiefer Tucker 2, Dalton Ribordy 2, Brayden Gage 1, Korbin Hankinson 1, Tommy Dalton 1.

SACKS – Matt Rison 1

INTERCEPTIONS – Austin Moore, Korbin Hankinson