

Louisburg soccer ready for Bishop Miege test



Louisburg's Grant Ryals (left) and the rest of the Louisburg High School boys soccer team will go for the program's first state title tonight when the Wildcats face off with Bishop Miege in the Class 4-1A state semifinals at 7 p.m., in Topeka.

Preparing to play two more games this late in the season has never been on the itinerary for any member of the Louisburg boys soccer team – ever.

Following the Wildcats' first state quarterfinal victory in school history Tuesday over Trinity Academy, Louisburg is heading into uncharted territory. The Wildcats are gearing up for a chance to win the program's first state championship this weekend when they travel to the Class 4-1A state tournament in Topeka.

Still, the images from their 1-0 win over Trinity are still fresh in the players' mind as they celebrated the program's biggest win in its 14-year existence.

"It is amazing how at the beginning of the year maybe 20 people came to our game, and now since we played in the state quarterfinals, people just packed the stadium," Louisburg junior Grant Ryals said. "Everyone is sitting on the ground, you have people standing along the fence and the line to congratulate us after the game is as long as the whole

sideline – it just pretty amazing. We appreciate all the support.”

Players and coaches were inundated with phone calls and texts following the game, and into the night, congratulating them on their accomplishment.

“My phone was blowing up all night Tuesday and well into the early morning from either, Facebook, Twitter, text messages or just calls from family, old teammates and fellow coaches,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “It was an unbelievable experience and I think that the boys and the program past and present truly enjoyed it. Everyone in the school and community is talking about these boys and the success they are having and rightfully so. Because of that, I felt it spilled over into Wednesday’s training, but we got pretty focused throughout practice.”

However, there is no more time for celebration as the Wildcats will face their biggest test of the season in the Class 4-1A state semifinals when they face off with Bishop Miege at 7 p.m. tonight at Topeka’s Hummer Sports Park Complex.

Bishop Miege (16-2-1) is no stranger to the state tournament as they have won four state titles since 1998 and have been a state runner-up five times. The Stags have also won 15 regional titles in the program’s history.

Their lone losses this season were a 3-2 defeat at the hands of Blue Valley West and a double overtime loss to Blue Valley Southwest. The Stags also tied with St. Thomas Aquinas.

Louisburg (14-4-1) realizes it has a tall order in front of them if it wants to play in the championship game – maybe one of Biblical proportions.

“They are basically Goliath and I think everyone knows that,” Louisburg senior Curran Conklin said. “That is more of a challenge for us and I think we are ready to take that on.”

The Wildcats will look to lean on a defense that has posted back-to-back shutouts in the playoffs that is led by Conklin, seniors Kolten Ragan and Jacob Benne, junior Kris Light and senior goalie Ambrose Stefan.



Junior defender Kris Light heads the ball away during Tuesday's state quarterfinal match against Trinity.

It is the defense that has kept the Wildcats in several matches this season and they know they are playing some of their best soccer right now.

“Knowing our defensive line is as good as they are, it helps all of us play better because we are comfortable and we trust each other,” Ragan said. “I know Ambrose is comfortable with us and I think that helps him perform better as well. We all help each other.”

Still, Conley realizes the task will be a difficult one, but it is a challenge his team is looking forward to.

“Miege is unbelievably talented team,” Conley said. “They have been to countless state final fours and have won more than their fair share of state championships. “They are not just an extremely talented team, but have a fantastic coach as well. They are a team that will play very quick and as a team throughout the game. They move the ball fast and will exploit any weakness you team has.

“This could be the best team that this program has ever played. They are deep in talent and play extremely disciplined. We are clearly the underdog and that is fine with us. We have gotten zero respect for most of the season from the coaches poll in our ranking, so this is just another chance for us to prove people wrong.”

Win or lose, the Wildcats are guaranteed two matches and have a chance to bring home the program’s first state plaque. If Louisburg wins, they will play the winner of Basehor-Linwood and Andover Central in the championship at 2 p.m., on Saturday. Should they lose, the Wildcats will play at noon for third-place.

The top three placers at state are awarded trophies and the players hope they will be able to put a team picture in one for all to see.

“It would mean everything to me,” said senior Noah Juarez of possibly bringing home a state trophy. “If we can bring back a plaque I think people would remember us for a very long time in a positive way.”