

Wildcats end streak, return home with regional title



The Louisburg Wildcat seniors raise the regional championship trophy following the Wildcats' 20-0 victory over Independence on Friday in Independence. The Wildcats captured their first playoff win since 2012.

INDEPENDENCE – It had been four years since the Louisburg High School football team brought home any kind of plaque.

Playoff wins have been hard to come by for Louisburg as it hasn't won a postseason game since 2012. The Wildcats ended that streak Friday and did it in convincing fashion.

Louisburg shutout Independence 20-0 in Independence to finish as regional champions and the Wildcat players walked off the bus with that all-important plaque to put into the trophy case.

“It means everything to us, especially since we haven't had one in the four years that I have been here,” Louisburg's Korbin Hankinson said. “I am a senior, so this was our last time to do it and it is nice to have something in the school that we can always come back and look at and say we did that.”

The Wildcats (8-2) were able to do enough offensively to get the victory, but it was the defense that led the way. Louisburg played with a bend-but-don't-break attitude as it

intercepted two Independence passes.

Louisburg forced the Bulldogs to turn the ball over on downs three different times and also stopped a fake punt try to start the second half.



Louisburg seniors Dustyn Rizzo (left) and Ben Hupp pressure the Independence quarterback Friday during the Class 4A Division I regional playoff game.

It started up front with the defensive line comprised of seniors T.J. Dover, Matt Rison, Dustyn Rizzo, Ben Hupp and Mason Koechner, along with juniors Dalton Ribordy and Garrett Lowry, as they controlled the line of scrimmage and shut down the Bulldog rushing attack.

“This time of year, I think your defense can win you some ballgames and I thought our defense played as good as it has all year,” Louisburg co-head coach Jeff Lohse said. “Our front four did an outstanding job, and after we made a few changes,

we were right there to make plays in the passing game. It was a heck of an effort by them.

“We rely a lot on our front four. We like to take the run game away from teams and make them one-dimensional and that has worked for us.”

The Louisburg front four were able to funnel the Independence running backs to the linebackers and the Wildcats were there to clean it up. Senior linebackers Thomas San Agustin and Nick Hull, along with sophomore Austin Moore, each finished the game with a team-high 11 tackles, while Hankinson and Connor Green each had an interception.

Louisburg picked the perfect time for its defense to come through with a big game as the Wildcat offense struggled to move the ball at times. Independence actually outgained Louisburg 305 to 201 in total offense and the Bulldog defense caused a lot of confusion.



Senior Connor Green goes up for the interception in the second half of Friday's playoff game.

"It was hard to move the ball because you never know when they were going to blitz, and when they did, they did it hard," Louisburg quarterback Grant Harding said. "The stunted almost everything so it was hard to pick them all up."

The Wildcats were able to score in the first quarter when Hankinson dove for the pylon to finish off a 9-yard touchdown

run to put Louisburg up 7-0.

Harding was able to come up with a big play when the Wildcats needed it most right before halftime. A Hankinson interception in the redzone prevented an Independence score late in the second quarter, then Harding connected with Hankinson on a 61-yard touchdown pass with 20 seconds left to make it a two-score game.

“Grant is an excellent quarterback,” Hankinson said. “I have to give it all to him. If he can’t throw a good ball then I can’t catch it. Going into half, you always want to have that momentum so I knew it was going to be a big play. I just wanted to make sure I caught it and make it to the endzone.”

Harding and the Wildcat coaches saw something in the Independence defense that gave them the opportunity to try for the score.

“It was huge,” Harding said of the score. “We ran the same play twice. The first time we tried to hit the tight end across the middle, then we came back and I knew Korbin would be open so we ran it again and I just threw it up and let him catch it.”



Co-head coach Jeff Lohse signals for a touchdown following Grant Harding's 61-yard pass to Korbin Hankinson.

Louisburg's special teams rose to the occasion in the second half as it sniffed out an Independence fake punt to start the third quarter and the Wildcat defense took care of the rest.

Green intercepted a Bulldog pass late in the fourth quarter, which eventually led to the Wildcats' final score of the game – a 3-yard touchdown from San Agustin with 43 seconds left.

"We got the monkey off our back," Lohse said. "For these seniors, this is the first time they have won a playoff game and were able to bring a plaque home, so they are pretty excited."



The Louisburg football team poses for a picture with their regional championship trophy.

So, what is the Wildcats' reward for finally snapping that playoff drought? A date with quite possibly the best football team in the entire state of Kansas.

Louisburg will host the top team in Class 4A Division I – Bishop Miege – at 7 p.m. Friday at Wildcat Stadium. The Stags have rolled through the district and regional playoffs, winning their four games by a combined score of 222-19.

Miege's lone loss of the season came in its season opener against one of the top teams in Class 6A – Blue Valley.

"Everyone knows what we are going to get," Lohse said. "They are probably the best team in the state at any level. I would put them and Blue Valley up there with anyone right now. This time of year you never know what could happen. We will show up on Friday night, we will play our tails off and whatever happens, happens."

