

Wildcats finish fourth at state tournament



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez (10) jumps into the air to win a header Saturday during the third-place game of the Kansas Class 4-1A State Soccer Championships at Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

TOPEKA – It had already made program history, but the Louisburg High School boys soccer team wanted more – much more.

The Wildcats had their eyes set on a state championship last weekend after they qualified for the Kansas Class 4-1A State Soccer Championships for the first time. At the very least, Louisburg wanted to finish in the top three and bring home a trophy to be displayed in the school for years to come.

Those hopes were dashed as Louisburg suffered a pair of losses, including a 5-0 defeat Friday in the semifinals to the eventual state champion, Bishop Miege. A little more than 12 hours later, Louisburg faced off with Andover Central in the third place match, but came up short in a 2-0 loss Saturday at the Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

Louisburg (14-6-2) may have seen its season end with two losses, but the Wildcats made a big jump from the previous season as it won twice as many games as the year before and captured its first-ever state quarterfinal victory.

“Coming off the season they came off of, we knew that we were going to have a lot of work to do.,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We knew for any of this to happen, it would just be unbelievable and would be the greatest thing ever. Now that our expectations are so high, we are super disappointed because we didn’t play well. It is so frustrating because the boys did so well and came so far. It stinks, but at the same time when you look back it is an unbelievable journey and unbelievable ride. It is a fantastic experience with a great group of young men.”

The Wildcats were hoping to salvage the state tournament with a win over Andover Central for third place, but Louisburg was forced to play from behind for almost the entire match.

Andover Central’s Jacob Meeker put the Jaguars on top less than two minutes into the match and Andover’s Jayden Vossen added another goal with 20 minutes left in the first half.

“We were just trying to get settled,” Conley said of the first goal. “We gave up maybe two goals like that all year and one of the best players in the state gets a great run and we can’t get a body on him. Then for the rest of the game I think we were on our heels. It is unfortunate. I was just thinking if we could weather the storm for the first 10 minutes, get our feet under us because we are all fired up, but two minutes and then boom.



Defender Jacob Benne clears the ball away near the goal Saturday.

Louisburg did have its chances, especially in the first half, as senior Jacob Benne ripped a shot off a deflected corner kick from 25 yards away that was saved.

Seniors Noah Juarez, Herman Knipp, along with juniors Scott Murphy, Raistlin Brewer and Grant Ryals, all had opportunities, but their shots were either just wide or found the hands of the Andover goalie.

The opportunities were not quite as prevalent in the second half as the Andover defense kept a lot of people back and limited the Wildcats' shots on goal.

"Andover Central is a team that bunkers in and once they get a lead they are going to sit in," Conley said. "We kept getting

chance after chance, we just could not get one to go in. If we would have, we would've instantly had the momentum because just needed that one little jolt. That would have got the crowd going and they would have felt that energy a little bit. Unfortunately, their keeper made some big saves and it is what it is. It is disappointing, but it has been a great run and we should be holding our heads up."



Senior Ty Martin tries to dribble past an Andover Central defender Saturday during the third-place game in Topeka.

Bishop Miega also scored quickly on the Wildcats as it scored a goal in the opening minutes of the semifinal game and dominated possession. Louisburg was able to keep it a one score game for much of the first half, but the Stags scored right before halftime to make it a 2-0 deficit for the

Wildcats.

The Stags scored three more goals in the second half, including one on a penalty kick. Miede went on to play for the state championship and beat Basehor-Linwood 1-0 in overtime.

In the first half we gave up a quick goal again and it was just nerves playing in this atmosphere," Conley said. "Miede came at us hard and we were extremely nervous. We gave up a soft goal right before half and we were on our heels a little bit. It was good experience for everyone because we were able get a lot of kids in so everyone got to get in the game and play against the eventual state champion."

Despite the two losses, the Wildcats realize it was a good season that brought several good memories. Still it was bittersweet for Wildcat seniors Noah Juarez, Jacob Benne, Ty Martin, Calvin Cassida, Curran Conklin, Kolten Ragan and Herman Knipp as they played their final game in a Louisburg uniform.

"These boys had an up and down career," Conley said. "They have faced a lot of adversity, but they turned it around at the end of last year and had a great run. They won a regional championship and lost to the eventual state champion in Rose Hill and it was a fantastic shot of confidence for them because then they could believe in themselves. Then I tried to get them to buy into a system and believe in what I can see out of them and what they can do, and then see them become that was unbelievable. Then to beat a team like Trinity to get here in the first place was phenomenal and doing it at home in front of a ridiculous amount of people."

"Beating Tonganoxie, De Soto, tying Spring Hill, sweeping Ottawa, going to state – things this program hasn't done in a long time has been a lot of fun. It is a credit to their work ethic and how hard their devotion, belief and love for one another just emulated in a great journey for us."