

Louisburg hopes for big season in just second year



Louisburg junior Bailey Belcher (right) returns to help lead the Wildcat girls soccer team after scoring a team-high 33 goals last season. Louisburg opens their season Thursday at Tonganoxie.

It was a year no one associated with Louisburg High School girls soccer will soon forget.

In their inaugural season in 2016, all the Wildcats did was finish the season with 14 wins, a regional championship and a spot in the state quarterfinals.

The bar was set high from the start for Louisburg, but instead of settling, the Wildcats want to raise it even higher for the 2017 campaign.

“Last year’s team exceeded everyone’s standards,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “It was such an unbelievable ride. Last year’s team set a standard for us and an expectation. We now know that we are more than capable of achieving amazing things. At the same time, now there are those expectations so we will have some pressure to fulfill them.

“Last season did give the girls an idea of what a team can achieve and I could not be prouder of that life lesson. I also feel that everyone is focused on a common goal.”

The journey to achieve that goal begins Thursday when the Wildcats travel to Tonganoxie for their season opener. Louisburg will have an experienced look moving forward for a program that is just in its second season.

Louisburg, which lost just three seniors from a year ago, return eight starters and features a deeper bench. Although the Wildcats do have a veteran look, they have added 14 new players to the program.



Louisburg senior Bryn O'Meara (pictured) was named team captain along with fellow senior Madisen Simpson and junior Bailey Belcher.

"We did lose three fantastic young ladies (Maddie McDaniel, Rylee Bergh and Lilly Scott) and they left some difficult shoes to fill, but we are returning nearly everyone from last year's team," Conley said. "The hope is that with the returners and new players we should be able to handle their absence. By having so many returners it also allows us to have a little bit of familiarity with what we are trying to achieve in this program. It also allows the returners to be leaders and help teach the newcomers and/or freshmen.

"It is amazing to see that many newcomers. We have 10 freshman, two sophomores and two juniors come out for the team. The girls really have gelled well and are continuing to grow as they become more familiar with my standards and expectations. I could not be prouder of how these young ladies have bought in and work their tails off."

One of those returners is junior Bailey Belcher, who along with seniors Bryn O'Meara and Madisen Simpson, were recently named team captains. Belcher set a high bar herself a year ago as she scored a team-high 33 goals from the midfield position and will be a big scoring option again after earning first team all-league and all-state honors last season.

Joining Belcher in the midfield will be a rotation of sophomore Hayli Detherage, Simpson, senior Lily Cook, freshman Hannah Straub, freshman Trinity Moore and sophomore Hallie Hutsell. Senior Quincy Rice, junior Savannah Reinhart and freshman Mackenzie Scholtz will all play up top at the forward spot.

"I feel that Bailey is going to have another incredible year," Conley said. "It might not be as glorious as the 33 goals that she scored last year, but I think she will be just as

effective. She is moving into a new role as well so it will take some time for her to adjust. I feel that she will be a threat that teams are going to have to respect.

“Toward the end of the season, she was double teamed every time she touched it so it will be no different for her this year. I actually think this will allow her to show the other aspects of her game and that she is a complete player by finding the open girls and allowing them to take advantage of the space provided.”



Sophomore Camdyn Clark, an all-league and all-state player a year ago, hopes to help lead the Wildcat defense.

The Wildcats also return an experienced defense and that starts with goalie Shay Whiting. The Louisburg junior earned second team all-league and all-state honors a year ago with

eight shutouts and 86 saves.

Also returning is sophomore Camdyn Clark, who was also a second-team player on the all-state and all-league teams for her role as an outside back. O'Meara and Clark will play on the outside again this season and will be joined by a rotation of junior Georgia Wilde, freshman Avery O'Meara, sophomore Bria Jensen and sophomore Kaitlyn Lewer.

Lewer will replace Bergh at the center back position this season. Bergh, who was a first-team all-league and second team all-state player as a senior last year, left a big void in the Wildcat defense but Conley believes Lewer can do the job.

"Rylee may be the most difficult to replace from last year's team," Conley said. "She was a leader and played at such a high work rate. We are looking for a variety of options to fill her role and injuries have made it difficult, but I am anticipating Kaitlyn to fill the void that Rylee left. She is just as aggressive and has quite a bit of pace as well. I am excited to see how the back line adjusts and grows throughout the year. Their communication and chemistry might be the most important on our team.

"The whole team is much faster and athletic this year believe it or not. I think that will allow us to play at an even higher level. It will also be interesting to see how our back four come together as well. I want them to become even more engaged in the attack and my expectations for the returning outside backs (Bryn and Camdyn) is extremely high. I feel that they are going to be able to play at a higher level than they did last year."

After Thursday's game with Tonganoxie, the Wildcats will have a week off for spring break and then have their home opener at 6 p.m. on March 28 against reigning Frontier League champion, De Soto.