

# Wildcats take fourth at Class 4-1A state tournament



Louisburg sophomore Kaitlyn Lower heads the ball away from a Maize South player Saturday during the Class 4-1A third-place game at Friends University in Wichita. The Wildcats fell 8-0 and finished fourth in the state.

WICHITA – One by one, the Louisburg High School girls soccer players received their state medals and cemented the best finish in school history.

Despite all that, the Wildcats had hoped for more.

In its first Class 4-1A state tournament appearance, Louisburg ended its season with a pair of losses, including an 8-0 defeat to Maize South in the third-place game Saturday at Friends University in Wichita.

It was hard for the Wildcats to think of the positives in what was a rough, couple days. Still, there were plenty there for the second-year program.

“A second-year program getting fourth in the state is incredible,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “You can’t fathom that. Getting 13 and 14 wins in consecutive seasons is unbelievable and that almost matches the top teams in the state, no matter what class you are.

“I hope we can use this experience to move forward and

hopefully we will be good enough to make another run in the next couple of years so we can remember this and know what it is like and build on it.”

The Wildcats (13-7-1) opened the tournament with a 1-0 loss to Thomas More Prep on Friday before facing a Maize South team that fell to Bishop Miege in overtime. Miege went on to beat TMP 1-0 to win the Class 4-1A state championship.



**Senior Bryn O'Meara races to beat a Maize South to a 50-50 ball Saturday in Wichita.**

Maize South seem inspired from the get-go as it scored six goals in the first eight minutes to jump on the Wildcats. Louisburg junior Bailey Belcher and senior Bryn O'Meara each had a shot on goal, but Louisburg couldn't get much going against a strong Maize South defense.

Louisburg trailed 6-0 at halftime, but it made things a little more difficult in the second half for Maize South as it managed just two goals.

"The girls kept fighting," Conley said. "They got on us early and we kind of put our heads down and they put four in really quick. The girls recovered and got mentally strong. I think they held their own in the second half and it was good to hear the opposing coach yelling to tell his players to work. I just wish we could have started that way, but it is what it is. That is the best team in the state in my opinion."

The loss also meant the Wildcats had to say goodbye to seniors Lily Cook, Bryn O'Meara, Quincy Rice and Madisen Simpson, who played their final game with the program.

"Bryn, Madisen, Quincy and Lily – those four kids did a heck of a job," Conley said. "Whether it was their leading by example attitude, or their demeanor and how they carried themselves and set a great example for what we want this program to be looked upon. If you look at our crowd, we had more fans than anyone else, and that includes road games. That truly is a tribute to the girls on how hard they work and how much they mean to this town. The girls truly love it."

After coming up one loss short of the state tournament last season, the Wildcats took another step forward this year by making the state semifinals and getting that fourth-place finish.

It was a finish many in the program didn't expect with such a young group, especially early in the season on a team that started seven freshmen and sophomores.





Members of the Louisburg girls soccer team are (front row, from left) Bailey Belcher, Savannah Reinhart, Quincy Rice, Bryn O'Meara, Madisen Simpson, Skylar Bowman, Morgan Messer, Shay Whiting, Hallie Hutsell, Avery O'Meara, (back row) assistant coach Michael Pickman, Camdyn Clark, Leia Shaffer, Bria Jensen, Hayli Detherage, Trinity Moore, Mackenzie Scholtz, Kailtyn Lewer, Hannah Straub, Lily Cook, Erin Lemke and head coach Kyle Conley.

"When you make the final four, I think that exceeds your expectations. For us, our goal was to play for a regional championship and go from there. I think there were some games in the regular season that we gave away, but the best four teams in the state are here. We have to keep that in mind no matter how upset or frustrated we get. We literally just got fourth in state and that is incredible.

"It stinks to lose twice, and I will probably be pouting about it for a couple weeks, but when you look back at it, how can you ask for any more? This experience is something the kids are going to remember for the rest of their lives and I hope they truly understand how special it was."

## **Wildcats come up short of state championship game**

In the Class 4-1A state semifinals against Thomas More Prep, Louisburg had its eyes set on a spot in the state championship game.

The Wildcats were just one score away from reaching their goal.

After a scoreless first half, TMP dashed the Wildcats' hopes as it got a goal from Kayla Vitztum five minutes into the second half and that was all the Monarchs needed in their 1-0 win Friday over Louisburg.



**Louisburg junior Bailey Belcher heads the ball away from a TMP player Friday in the Class 4-1A state semifinal game.**

"You could tell the girls were really nervous," Conley said. "They were nervous in the first 15-20 minutes in the semifinal game and then we got on our heels. We were just too anxious and were trying to do too much. We were not in our element and we were playing on turf, but that is not an excuse because we have to show up and play. When you start seven freshmen and

sophomores it is tough sometimes to be mentally strong.”

TMP had the ball on its side of the field most of the game, but when the Wildcats did have possession, the Monarchs made it difficult for them to get many shots on the goal with their defensive alignment as TMP had several players back protecting the goal.

The Wildcats did have one good chance in the finals minutes as Bailey Belcher had a good look at the goal, but her shot was saved by the TMP goalie.

“We struggled to adjust to pressure,” Conley said. “Against TMP, that was the ugliest formation you are ever going to see, but they do it effectively. That is a team that won eight straight games I think and had six shutouts during that time. They don’t give up many shots and they have a good goalkeeper. They just frustrated us tremendously and we couldn’t rebound from it.”