

New look Wildcats ready for Friday night lights



Louisburg running back Austin Moore is just one of a handful of starters returning for the Wildcats this season. Louisburg begins play Friday when it hosts Wyandotte at Wildcat Stadium.

It's been a season of change for the Louisburg High School football team – one that started when the 2016 campaign came to a close.

The Wildcats had to say goodbye to 16 seniors, several of which played big roles on last season's 8-3 regional championship team. A few months later, the Wildcats promoted assistant Robert Ebenstein to the head coaching role.

Since then, several new assistants have come on board, they have installed a brand new offense and many new faces will play key positions on the field for the 2017 season. The Wildcat players will even have new designs on their helmets.

It may be a brand new look for Louisburg football, but the mentality is still the same – win a lot of games.

"My expectations are really high," junior Austin Moore said. "I don't see any reason that we shouldn't be any better than last year's team was. I think we can win some playoff games

this year and maybe more than we did last year.”

Louisburg will kick off its season at 7 p.m. Friday when it hosts Wyandotte, and the Wildcats are looking to show off their new product – one they have been working on all off-season.

The Wildcats spent the summer in the weight room, on the practice field and watching film in order to get a jump on the rest of the teams. It also gave them ample opportunity to perfect a new offense.

“We are starting to settle in and we are getting used to each other,” senior lineman Garrett Lowry said. “We are starting to build more chemistry with the offensive line and the backs are getting there. Offense is going to be a lot different than it has been, and it has taken awhile to get used to, but we are getting it down.”

The summer and first few weeks of practice also gave the players a chance to get used to their new head coach and he to them.

“This has gone as smooth as I could have expected,” Ebenstein said. “There are definitely ups and downs and bumps along the way, but the support that has been shown to our team so far this season from the parents, community and school administration has been overwhelming and greatly appreciated.

“The new faces among the coaching staff as well as the others that have been here for a while now have been incredible assets for our team and myself. They are amazing coaches and have made my transition much smoother than expected.”

With a new offense comes a new leader at quarterback. Junior Blue Caplinger (5-10, 170) and sophomore Madden Rutherford (6-3, 180) are battling in practice for the starting job and Ebenstein likes what he sees from both players.

“One of our lingering questions is the quarterback position right now,” he said. “We are very blessed to have both Blue and Madden. They are both great kids, athletes and competitors. Right now we will continue to split reps and continue to evaluate. I am very excited for both of them this season. I think they will both find their fits in whatever roles they end up with.

“As for if it is a good thing, I think it is. Iron sharpens iron, and if those to push each other all season, it will elevate both of their games.”



Senior lineman Garrett Lowry, a 3-year starter at tackle, will lead a young Wildcat offensive

line.

The offensive line will be new as well. Lowry (6-5, 250) returns as a 3-year starter at tackle, but the other four spots will feature new faces. Junior Kiefer Tucker (5-10, 195) will join Lowry on the offensive line, but there will be plenty of competition for the other three spots between Noah Larson (6-2, 195), Brayden White (6-3, 240), Garrett Harding (5-11, 220), Matt Holloway (6-0, 230), Jonathan DePriest (6-1, 220), Cole Williams (5-7, 160), Hunter Day (6-0, 260), Will Smith (5-11, 210) and James Foote (6-0, 155).

“As a whole we will be young,” Ebenstein said. “Garrett has started for three years and is definitely our leader up front. We have many kids who are working very hard for those spots, and each of those positions will most definitely be earned and not granted by any means. Kiefer is a kid who we are very excited for and he is an absolute stud – extremely strong, quick, tough and smart.

“Our depth at offensive line is solid and as we continue to grow throughout this season, I think it could be a strength for sure.”

The Wildcats will also have a strong group of running backs to try and run behind them. Moore (6-1, 195) returns after seeing several snaps at the varsity level last season and will see several carries this season along with Will Ridley (5-9, 175), Brayden Gage (5-8, 140) and Charlie Koontz (5-7, 175).

Seniors Christian Tosterud (5-10, 175) and Desmond Doles (6-3, 180) return to lead the Wildcat wide receivers. Tosterud, along with Lowry and Moore, were also named the team captains for the upcoming season.

Kohl Vogel (6-0, 155), Gage and Ben Minster (6-1, 205) will also see some time at wide receiver as well.

Defensively, the Wildcats will be strong again up the middle

as Lowry returns in center of line and Moore, a first-team all-Frontier League player on defense last season, comes back to lead the defense at middle linebacker.

Ebenstein believes his defense has a chance to be very good thanks to his players and defensive coordinator Jeff Lohse.

"Jeff's understanding of the game and how to defeat offensive formations is up there with the best of anyone I have ever seen," Ebenstein said. "So once Jeff gets his game plans set, I am very confident in our coaches to carry out and teach it to the kids.

"Needless to say we are very excited for Austin this season (on both sides of the ball). With Austin at Mike Linebacker and Garrett at a 3-Tech, we are very confident that we can shut down the inside run game against anybody."

Lowry will get some help on the defensive line from Tucker, Larson, White and DePriest, while the Wildcats will lean on seniors Mitchell Drew (6-0, 175) and Ridley to help Moore at the linebacker spot.

Doles, Tosterud and Gage will lead the Wildcat secondary and will get help from Caplinger, Rutherford and Minster at times as well.

The Wildcats, like most years, will have a difficult schedule within the Frontier League and district play. However, Ebenstein is confident in his group of players.

"The Frontier League is one of the toughest leagues in the state regardless of classification," he said. "There are no 'easy weeks' and every team has quality coaches and quality players. I think we do as well. I think we will continue to prove that Louisburg football will be a consistent front-runner in the Frontier League standings when it is all said and done."