

Wildcat soccer hopes to build off historic season



Louisburg High School senior Grant Ryals changes directions with the ball during the team's scrimmage Friday. Ryals, along with fellow senior Kris Light and Scott Murphy, were named team captains for the upcoming season.

The season for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team might have ended with a pair of losses, but even with that, the Wildcats had the best finish in program history.

Louisburg came in fourth in the Class 4-1A state tournament last season in Topeka and left a lot within the program feeling good about they accomplished.

That feeling has since faded as the Wildcats are more focused on making a second consecutive trip to state this coming season. The players know the road to state is going to be more difficult this time around.

"Last year has given us the confidence to get back there, but we have to fight for what we have," senior Kris Light said. "Everyone else is going to come for us after placing at state, so we have to uphold what we had last year. Every game is going to be a challenge."

The Wildcats lost seven seniors off of last season's team, including a trio of all-state players in midfielder Noah

Juarez and defenders Jacob Benne and Curran Conklin. Despite that, Louisburg will suit up 10 seniors this year, including several players who played big roles on last season's team.

Despite the loss of Juarez, Louisburg hopes to form a strong midfield with seniors Grant Ryals, Raistlin Brewer, Christian Scholtz, junior Eric Vazquez, and sophomores Ryan Haight and Landon Johnson.

Ryals, who was named team captain along with Light and Scott Murphy, returns to lead the Wildcats after earning first team all-Frontier League honors last season and was named second team all-state. Johnson was also selected honorable mention all-league.

"I think this group has a chance to be very special, but unfortunately with injuries, there are going to have to be some changes," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "When healthy though, I think this group will be as good as any midfield that we go against. If these young men stay within themselves and play the system, I honestly feel that we will be a very, very dangerous team."



Louisburg senior Ambrose Stefan returns as the Wildcat starting goalkeeper.

Louisburg will also feature a lot of experience on the defensive side of the ball. Light and Murphy, both seniors, return to lead the Wildcat back line. Senior goalie Ambrose Stefan also returns for his second year as a starter in the net.

Light and Stefan both earned all-state and all-league honors last season. Seniors Kyle Allen, Jarod Rose and sophomore William Frank hope to fill the void left by Conklin and Benne and Conley knows his defense will be another strength the Wildcats can rely on.

“Unlike last year’s team, we are actually returning some defensive players,” Conley said. “Having some experience in the back definitely helps with the learning curve. We will also have several inexperienced players in the back so communication will be vital. I think losing Curran and Jacob are going to be really hard to replace because they literally shout the outside of the field down.

“With the young men we have filling those roles their work ethic is second to none. It will take some time for us to gel as a unit, but we will be a very determined and fit defense. The expectation is that Ambrose will be even better this year, after his breakout year last year.”

In his second year on defense, Murphy said his group knows what it will take to be successful this year.

“We lost some really good outside backs, but I think we have the kids to step up and take care of those spots,” Murphy said. “Communication is the most important thing. If we are not talking and organized, then we are going to give up goal after goal. I learned that my sophomore year. We didn’t talk a lot and we lost a lot of games because we didn’t know what was going on.”



Raistlin Brewer is one of 10 Louisburg seniors this season.

Juniors Eli Minster, Brock Bila and Chris Williams will man the forward spot as the Wildcats begin their journey toward another state tournament appearance.

‘Making it to state was huge for this year,’ Ryals said. ‘We actually saw a rise in attendance and we actually had to make cuts for the first time in a few years. We did lose a lot of seniors, but we also had a lot of juniors, sophomores and a freshman that started for us last year. It gives us a lot of confidence going into the season.’

‘If we could make it to state again for the second year in a row, I think that would be a huge accomplishment. Our goal is to definitely get a regional championship first, and after that, take it game by game.’

After leading Louisburg to its best finish in school history in just his first season with the program, Conley is excited to see what is in store for his second year.

“I think this team will have a big target on our back,” Conley said. “We will not be able to sneak up on anyone like we did last year. I expect each and every night will be a dog fight. I anticipate us to get everyone’s best shot. We will have a team goal of a regional championship. We will have some additional goals, but with the caliber of teams we play and that are in our league, we will have our work cut out for us.”

Louisburg opens its season Tuesday when it hosts Fort Scott. Junior varsity will play first at 4:30 p.m. and varsity will follow at approximately 6 p.m.