

Ryals' penalty kick lifts Wildcats to regional title



Louisburg senior Kris Light hoists the regional championship trophy following the Wildcats' 1-0 win over Independence on Thursday in the Class 4-1A regional championship game in Louisburg.

Grant Ryals had already gotten his mom, Janelle, flowers for her birthday prior to Thursday's Class 4-1A regional championship game in Louisburg.

As it turned out, Ryals gave his mother – and the rest of the Louisburg soccer team – a present no one is going to forget.

In a scoreless match in overtime, Ryals converted a penalty kick to give Louisburg a 1-0 victory over Independence. The win gave the Wildcats their third consecutive regional title and the seventh in the program's history.

Following the team celebration that found Ryals on the bottom of a dog pile, he ran to his mother after he gave her one of the more memorable presents a parent could want.

"First thing I did was give her the biggest hug," Grant said. "I bought her flowers earlier and I was hoping that we would win and it would be that much better. Then for me to score the game-winner was just perfect."

That perfect feeling spread to the rest of the Wildcat team as

they celebrated their opportunity to play at least one more game as they are one of the state's final eight teams.

"It was our goal," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "We talked about getting 10 wins, we talked about being league champs and we talked about winning a regional championship. If we work hard, do our job, then those things happen. We almost left it here with our inability to finish the ball, but the kids worked hard and it's fantastic.

"It is so awesome when the community comes and joins us. These boys play so much for these people and love them so much – not just their family – but everybody. It is really cool be able to host this and do our job at the beginning of the season to be able to do this."



Grant Ryals points to the stands after he scored the game-winning goal in overtime Thursday.

Louisburg's job is not done, however, as the Wildcats will host the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal game for the second consecutive season. They will play McPherson at 5 p.m. on Tuesday at Wildcat Sports Complex.

As exciting as the Wildcats' regional championship was, Louisburg had an opportunity to put some distance between itself and Independence several different times throughout the contest.

The Wildcats (13-5) took 24 shots against an Independence defense that had eight or nine players behind the ball at all times. Despite Independence's tactic of trying to pack it in, Louisburg still had many good looks, but couldn't convert.

Brock Bila, Jarod Rose, Landon Johnson, Christian Scholtz, Eric Vazquez, Raistlin Brewer and Chris Williams all had shots on goal, but they either just went wide of the target, sailed above the cross bar, or was saved.

Frustration was starting to mount at times as the Wildcats desperately wanted to get a score in regulation.

"You start pressing and they were trying to do a little bit too much," Conley said of his team. "They struggled to get into the flow a little bit and Independence was another team that put a ton of kids behind the ball. They were basically looking to get a tie. Every now and then they would counter, but they just packed it in. They did a good job of not getting us good looks, but when we did, we weren't able to finish it.

"Independence started believing a little bit and got the momentum. However, our kids were mentally tough and fought through all that. They didn't quit and that is a credit to them."

The Wildcats thought they had broken through earlier in the contest as Ryals found the back of the net on a direct kick from 20 yards away less than 10 minutes into the second half.

However, after the celebration, the Wildcats were called for offsidess and impeding the view of the goalie, and the goal was disallowed.



Senior Raistlin Brewer heads the ball away Thursday against Independence.

That left for even more angst on the Wildcat sidelines.

“It all worked out in the end, but it was extremely frustrating at the time,” Conley said. “We went from a high to a low when we found out it didn’t count and had a little ‘Woe is me’ moment. Then we picked it back up and started taking care of things.”

Louisburg’s defense, which hasn’t allowed a goal so far in the postseason, tightened up when Independence tried to attack. Kris Light, Scott Murphy, Will Frank and Eli Minster fortified the Wildcat back line, while goalie Ambrose Stefan secured his

third consecutive shutout.

Independence's best chance came early in the overtime as the Bulldogs sent a corner kick into the box that bounced around before Brewer cleared the ball away and prevented the game-winner.

With four minutes left in the overtime, Johnson put pressure on the Bulldog defense as he dribbled the ball into the box and was taken down by an Independence defender. The Wildcats were awarded the penalty kick and Conley chose Ryals to take it.

"I have been a part of stranger things," Conley said. "We talked earlier this week that Independence beat Baldwin 1-0 on only one shot, which was a penalty kick. The way they were packing it in, I was praying he was going to put it in. I couldn't look at first, but then I had to."

Ryals left no doubt as he pounded the shot past the diving Independence goalie and the celebration began as his goal put the Wildcats into the state quarterfinals.



The Louisburg soccer team poses for a picture following the Wildcats regional championship victory over Independence. It was the seventh regional title in program history.

"The day before at practice, we probably took PK's for like 30-45 minutes" Ryals said. "I just kind of had a feeling that this game might come down to it. I didn't miss any in practice and I have only missed one all season. I just did what I usually do. He guessed the right way, but I just beat him with too much power."

Now, the Wildcats will try for their second straight trip to the state semifinals and a win over McPherson would seal that.

"You want to play as long as you can," Conley said. "You win a regional championship and then anything can happen. You make the Elite 8 and it is really fun and you take great pride in it. I couldn't be more proud of how hard we played. We kept grinding and that is a good thing and proud of them for not giving up."

Make sure to [click here](#) for more photos from Louisburg's regional championship victory.