

Wildcats' state run ends with loss to McPherson in quarterfinals



Louisburg senior Grant Ryals tries to dribble past two McPherson players during the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal match last Tuesday in Louisburg. The Wildcats saw their season come to an end with a 2-1 loss to McPherson.

As the final buzzer sounded in Louisburg's loss to McPherson in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals last Tuesday, it marked the end of race the Wildcats weren't ready to stop running.

They wanted to keep running all the way to the state semifinals for the second straight season and hoped to bring home a state plaque. The Wildcats almost accomplished that as they put the pressure on McPherson throughout much of the second half, but couldn't convert in the 2-1 defeat that ended their season with a 13-6 record at Wildcat Sports Complex.

It was a second half the Wildcats won, except for a call that ended up being the difference in the contest.

Senior goalie Ambrose Stefan came out to save the ball, but was given a yellow card after the referee said he made contact with a McPherson player. The Bullpups put the penalty kick in the back of the net with 32 minutes left in the match and the Wildcats didn't have an answer.

“The kids showed up and played despite the loss,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We maintained the pressure, had the greater edge in possession and we did a good job of finding feet and playing our game. We had a couple chances, and I don’t know what happened to give them the penalty kick – it’s just the way it goes I guess. I don’t agree with it, and it is unfortunate, but that didn’t lose us the game.”

The Wildcats came out with a sense of urgency in the second half after they found themselves down 1-0 at halftime. It could have been a bigger deficit, but the Louisburg defense came through as Stefan knocked away several shots in front of the goal, and McPherson had a good look at an empty net, but defender Eli Minster headed the ball away to keep it a one score game.

Conley wanted his team to play with a sense of urgency in the second half and the Wildcats did that as they were able to control the possession and put pressure on the Bullpup defense.

“We needed to play with more energy, play harder and go win a 50-50 ball,” he said. “I didn’t want them to have any regrets and to put it all out there. I just wanted them to play with a little more passion, and a little more heart and I think the second half we showed that. We showed how good of a team we could be, how good we are and we just couldn’t get one to go in.”

Louisburg came out of halftime inspired and tied the match three minutes into the second half. Senior Raistlin Brewer was able to get the ball across the line in a scrum in front of the goal to give the Wildcats their first score of the match.



Raistlin Brewer tries to beat a couple McPherson players to a 50-50 ball Tuesday.

McPherson scored on the penalty kick five minutes later, but the Wildcats stayed on the attack

Senior Grant Ryals had a good look at the goal with eight minutes left in the game, but his shot was saved. Fellow senior Christian Scholtz had a header opportunity in the box that nearly went in, but it bounced off the crossbar.

Sophomore Ryan Haight had a shot on goal with four minutes remaining that went off the crossbar as well. At that point, Conley took out a defender and brought in junior Chris Williams to join fellow forward Brock Bila up top to try and get more scoring chances, but the Wildcats weren't able to find the back of the net.

"We could have stayed with what we had and still got plenty of

looks,” Conley said. “We just wanted two guys a little bit higher so we could be more aggressive. I didn’t think we could do it the whole game because if left such huge channels for them to run on and that is all they wanted to do. Unfortunately we just couldn’t get one to go in and McPherson was just holding on for dear life in the last 30 minutes.

“We kept grinding and had great opportunities. We hit the crossbar twice, we just couldn’t quite get it there. McPherson is a good team, and I think everyone anticipated a great game and that is what it ended up being. Coming out on the bottom end of it stinks really bad, but I think the kids played their butts off and they left it all out there and did everything we could.”



Goalie Ambrose Stefan gets a hug from coach Kyle Conley following the Wildcats' 2-1 loss to McPherson.

The loss ended what was a successful season for the Wildcats as they finished with their first Frontier League championship since 2010 and third consecutive regional title. Conley was happy with what his team was able to accomplish.

“We got 10 wins in the regular season, not many teams do that,” he said. “We won a league title, not many teams can say they did that. Winning a regional championship, not many teams can say they did that either. We came through, played really hard, but unfortunately we came out on the losing end. I am proud of these guys and what we were able to achieve. “