

Scholtz's golden goal sends Wildcats to state semifinals



Louisburg sophomore Mackenzie Scholtz celebrates after she scored the game-winner in the Wildcats' 3-2 overtime victory over Heritage Christian on Tuesday during the Class 4-3-2-1A state quarterfinal match in Louisburg.

As Mackenzie Scholtz's shot sailed toward the net, she could only help but wonder if this was going to be the one.

Scholtz and the rest of her Wildcat teammates had peppered the Heritage Christian goal with shots the entire match with not much success. Frustration was building and the Wildcats' season was on the verge of coming to an abrupt end.

So, once she watched her shot find the back of the net in the overtime of Tuesday's Class 4-3-2-1A state quarterfinal match, tears started streaming down her face.

That goal gave Louisburg a 3-2 victory over Heritage Christian and put the Wildcats in the state semifinals for the second consecutive season. The golden goal emptied the Louisburg bench as they ran on the field to promptly pile on the game's hero.

"I just started crying immediately," Scholtz said. "I had been trying to score the whole game and I just couldn't get anything to go in. I was starting to give up and it was

getting in my head too much. I saw the open shot and I just tried to take it. Then everyone came running at me and I just started crying even more.”

Scholtz wasn't the only Wildcat overcome with emotion as several players ran onto the field, teary-eyed, knowing their chance a state championship is still alive.

“I am just so happy,” senior captain Bailey Belcher said. “I literally cried after it happened and then the whole way to the huddle and then again when we met the fans afterward. I am honestly surprised that it stopped.”



Members of the Louisburg girls soccer team pile on to teammate Mackenzie Scholtz after she scored the game-winning goal.

The match provided more drama than maybe some were expecting.

Earlier in the season, the Wildcats defeated Heritage Christian, 8-0, and had a 2-0 lead to start Tuesday's affair. The Chargers didn't back down as they scored two goals in a five-minute span that tied it up and eventually forced overtime.

Louisburg had plenty of chances as it took numerous shots on goal, including several on breakaway opportunities, but couldn't sneak it past the Heritage goalkeeper.

"The problem is when you play a team that you beat pretty handily earlier, it is hard to keep them focused and let them know that anything can happen," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "When they (Heritage) got that first goal, all of a sudden they had all the momentum and all the faith. We just could not find ourselves and they kept at us and we didn't finish balls that we have finished all year. Every ball went down the middle, but we just couldn't place it. It turned into an epic game with tons of pride."

Senior Bailey Belcher provided the Wildcats with the lead as she opened the scoring with a breakaway goal with 22 minutes left in the first half and Louisburg took a 1-0 advantage into halftime.

Belcher struck again in the second half as her goal with 27 minutes left in the game put the Wildcats up 2-0 and they seemed to have a comfortable advantage. However, Heritage Christian scored less than two minutes later to cut the lead in half and then tied it up shortly after on a goal from 25 yards out.

Louisburg regrouped and was able to put the two quick goals behind them and refocus.



Junior Kaitlyn Lewer (left) battles for position against Heritage Christian during the state quarterfinals Tuesday in Louisburg.

“It helped with Conley yelling at us, of course,” Belcher joked. “The girls then realized that it was our game to play and there is no reason that we shouldn’t go to state again, especially with how hard we have worked. We had a slow start, but we know what we needed to.”

The Wildcat defense tightened up in the final 20 minutes as the defenders Trinity Moore, Kaitlyn Lewer, Camdyn Clark, Skylar Bowman and Hannah Straub limited the Chargers’ opportunities. Goalie Shay Whiting also came up several saves, including a jump save in the first half where she knocked it out and a diving save early in the second half.

“Shay made a huge save there in the first half when she punched it out from 30 yards out and made another big save

where she stuck her bear claw out there,” Conley said. “She is back to playing well and confident. We just played a team that wanted to chip the ball in. We struggled a little bit to organize in the back, and unfortunately in our league we don’t see teams that shoot from that far out consistently like they did.”

Louisburg continued to apply pressure offensively as it dominated the possession and finally broke through five minutes into the overtime.

Scholtz got a pass from freshman Olivia Barber, drove it into the box and got it past the Heritage goalie for the game-winner.

“For a third year program to go to state twice now is incredible,” Conley said. “Mackenzie was getting herself in the right spot at times, but couldn’t get it to go through until the end there and it was a great moment.

“It was getting pretty chippy out there, and we talk about character a lot, and I told the girls to not let this define us. We have to support each other and then we started doing alright. They kids didn’t quit, never gave up and played their tails off.”



Senior Savannah Reinhart makes a pass Tuesday against Heritage Christian.

The quest for a state championship begins Friday when Louisburg (13-6) will square off with Topeka-Hayden at 7 p.m. in the Class 4-3-2-1A state semifinals at Bethel College in Newton. The Wildcats will either play McPherson (17-1-1) or Bishop Miege (12-6-1) on Saturday.

The third-place game will be at noon and the championship match will follow at 2 p.m. Last season, the Wildcats lost a tough semifinal match and ended up finishing fourth at state.

“I am nervous, but I am extremely excited,” Belcher said. “It is not often you see a third-year program get a chance to go to state for a second time. It is an opportunity that we need to take by the handle and something we need to work for. Last year wasn’t how we wanted it to turn out, so this year we are going to work for a better ending.”

Conley knows Topeka-Hayden will present a difficult challenge for his team, along with whoever they will have to play Saturday.

“Hayden is a really good team,” he said. “They are strong and physical and it is going to be a physical game. It will be essential that the girls hold their own because they are going to go into every tackle hard. If we go soft and flail at it, it is going to be a long day. We are going to get back to tackling, be strong with the ball, running through the ball and getting squared up when you tackle someone because they are going to be very physical.

“We will be refocused and the girls will understand that we will have play better if we want to have more success.”

For a photo gallery from the state quarterfinal match, make sure to [click here](#).