

LEAGUE CHAMPS: Louisburg knocks off Paola for No. 1 seed



Louisburg's Blue Caplinger (right) celebrates with teammate Jonathan DePriest following Caplinger's touchdown to open the game Friday at Paola High School. The Wildcats captured the Frontier League title with a 25-7 win over the Panthers.

PAOLA – Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford tried to avoid the internet prior to his team's game with Paola.

At the same time, Rutherford just couldn't help himself. He wanted to know what kind of chances people gave the Wildcats in Friday's battle of unbeatens.

Rutherford didn't like what he saw.

"Coming in there was a lot of hype from the Panther side of things and a lot of people were doubting us," Rutherford said. "I tried not to look at all the predictions online, but a lot of them had Paola either winning or winning big. That just fueled our fire."

Louisburg certainly had a lot of fire as the Wildcats put together their best game of the season at the perfect time. The Wildcats handed Paola its first loss of the season with a 25-7 victory at Panther Stadium, and at the same time earned

the Frontier League title and the No. 1 seed in the state playoffs. It was the Wildcats' first league title since 2010.

"It is just another win to be honest, but being able to come over to Paola with both teams being undefeated and a league championship on the line, it is true testament to these coaches and these players," Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein said. "They bought in and they worked their butts off and they earned this. This is all for them."

The two rivals created a festive atmosphere in Paola as the towns filled the stands on both sides, while Louisburg fans were two to three rows deep behind the fence next to the stands cheering on the Wildcats.

The Wildcat players appreciated the support and let the fans know how much by holding Paola to seven points and forcing four turnovers on defense. Offensively, the Wildcats converted several big plays that led to four touchdowns.

"That is huge," Ebenstein said. "I have never seen Louisburg travel as well as this and I have been here a few years. We have played some playoffs games in Independence and Chanute, but it just seemed like the whole town was here and it was jammed pack with fans.

"I just want to thank everyone for coming out and supporting us and being able to come home for the rest of the season is going to be a good feeling for sure."



Louisburg senior Noah Larson (54) celebrates a big stop for the Wildcat defense Friday in Paola.

Rutherford certainly did his part as he was involved in all four scores for the Wildcats and made a little history in the process. He became the first Wildcat in school history to pass for, rush for and a catch a touchdown in the same game according to Ebenstein.

The junior quarterback certainly got some help as it was a game full of great catches from receivers Brayden Gage and Blue Caplinger that led to touchdown scores.

Louisburg opened up the passing game on the Panthers as it knew Paola would be focusing on senior running Austin Moore, who entered the game with more than 1,000 yards on the ground and 18 touchdowns.

“That was the plan,” Ebenstein said. “Everyone in the world knows about Austin, and he is a stud, but the greatest thing about Austin is that I don’t think he cared one bit that we

didn't call his number 27 times. We were going to take what they gave us, we executed and those other guys played great."



Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford escapes the pocket to make pass Friday in Paola.

Rutherford, who finished the game with 172 yards through the air, led the Wildcats to a touchdown on their first possession of the game. He found Caplinger for a 25-yard touchdown pass that completed a nine-play drive, and after a missed extra point, Louisburg led 6-0.

On Paola's first play from scrimmage, the Wildcats forced a fumble and recovered to keep the Panthers off the board. In fact, they kept them scoreless for most of the first half.

Early in the second quarter, Louisburg got its passing game going again when Rutherford completed a 40 yard pass down the sideline to Gage. The Louisburg senior receiver went up in the

air for a jump ball and pulled it out of the Paola defenders' hands for the completion.

Two plays later, Rutherford found Gage again, this time for a 38-yard touchdown to give Louisburg a 12-0 lead.

On Louisburg's next drive, it was Caplinger's turn again as he made a 26-yard diving catch at the Paola 10-yard line to set up the Wildcats' next score. On a third down on the 9-yard line, Caplinger took the pitch from Rutherford, set his feet and threw it across the field to Rutherford who scored on the halfback pass to go up 19-0.



Louisburg's Garrett Harding (58), Austin Moore (21) and Charlie Koontz combine for a tackle late in the game Friday against Paola.

"It is amazing," Caplinger said of the win. "This is everything we have been working for. We just wanted to come

out and get them down quick because we knew they would be up for it, being a rivalry game.

“Madden was putting the throws on the spot and we were catching them. It was awesome to see and everything was falling our way.”

Louisburg got its offense going thanks to the offensive line of Noah Larson, Kiefer Tucker, Brayden White, Garrett Harding, Jonathan DePriest and tight end Michael Waldron.

Paola, which had given up 25 points all season, gave up 25 points to the Wildcats in three quarters and had never trailed all season coming into the game.

“I was impressed by our passing game,” Tucker said. “We made some amazing catches out there and Madden was throwing it good. The line was giving him great time to throw it and everyone was just clicking.

“Scoring first was huge for us. They hadn’t trailed all year and I don’t think they knew what to do. They were getting frustrated at each other and you could see it on the field. We just kept our composure and we played like it was 0-0 the entire time.”

Paola tried to get some momentum going into halftime as quarterback Seth Richmond connected with Corbin Gant on a 79-yard touchdown pass down the sideline.

Then to start the second half, the Panthers got the ball again and drove into the redzone. The Wildcat defense came up big as they forced Paola to turn the ball over downs and frustrate the Panthers even more.

After all the passing the Wildcats did in the first half, they got their running game going in the third quarter as Moore reversed field position for a 48-yard run. Rutherford then found Waldron on a 28-yard pass that set up another score.

Rutherford ran the ball down to the 1-yard line on the next play and followed it up with a quarterback sneak for a touchdown and a 25-7 Louisburg lead.

“Coach E was giving me some good play calls,” Rutherford said. “They could see a lot of things from the sideline and the booth and that made things pretty easy for me. The receivers ran crisp routes and Blue and Brayden just went up and got the ball. Michael (Waldron) also had a nice catch on third down as well, which was huge for us. I couldn’t be prouder of my guys.



Senior cornerback Beckett Rasmussen races down the field after an interception in the fourth quarter.

Defensively, Louisburg forced four turnovers on the night. The Wildcats got two interceptions from Beckett Rasmussen, including one with three minutes left in the game to help seal the win for the Wildcats. Moore and fellow linebacker Charlie

Koontz both recovered fumbles after Tucker and White forced them out.

Moore also led the Wildcats with 11 tackles, while Koontz and Larson each added eight in the win. Gage and Harding finished with six tackles and the Wildcat defense came up with the big plays when they needed them.

"I can't say enough good things about (defensive coordinator) Jeff (Lohse)," Ebenstein said. "He knows his stuff and he teaches it better than anybody. The kids pick it up and they just fire around and play for each other. The defense was just flying tonight. They played great."

The win gives the Wildcats the No. 1 seed in the playoffs and they will host every game at Wildcat Stadium. Louisburg (8-0) will face No. 16 Ottawa (0-8) at 7 p.m. on Friday in a rematch of the mud bowl two weeks ago that left the field unrecognizable.



Louisburg head coach Robert Ebenstein (front) and assistant Ty Pfannenstiel celebrate a big play in the first half.

“Our field is all messed up with the mud bowl we had earlier, but that is ok because I like our field,” Gage said. “It can be an advantage for us going into the playoffs. This just feels amazing. This is what we have been working for all season.”

As big as the win over Paola was, the Wildcats realize the true season is just now getting started.

“We worked all year for this and all the hard work has definitely paid off with all those extra reps and running after practice,” Tucker said. “It has all paid off, and the best thing about it is that it isn’t even over yet. We are just getting started. We haven’t put four quarters together yet but we are getting closer.”

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

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SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

L: Blue Caplinger 25 pass from Madden Rutherford (kick failed)

Second quarter

L: Brayden Gage 38 pass from Rutherford (run failed)

L: Rutherford 9 pass from Caplinger (Drake Varns kick)

P: Corbin Gant 79 pass from Seth Richmond (Ryan Wokutch kick)

Third quarter

L: Rutherford 1 run (kick failed)

STATISTICS

RUSHING – Austin Moore 18-90; Madden Rutherford 8-51; Blue Caplinger 3-25; Brayden Gage 4-21

PASSING – Madden Rutherford 7-14-172; Blue Caplinger 1-1-9

RECEIVING – Brayden Gage 3-84; Blue Caplinger 2-51; Michael Waldron 1-28; Madden Rutherford 1-9

TACKLES – Austin Moore 11, Charlie Koontz 8, Noah Larson 8, Brayden Gage 6, Brayden White 6, Blue Caplinger 5, Beckett Rasmussen 4, Kiefer Tucker 4, Tanner Belcher 3, Jorge LeBron 3, Brandon Cooper 2, Ben Wiedenmann 2, Andy Hupp 1, Jay Scollin 1.