

Louisburg-Paola rivalry to be on full display tonight



Senior Brayden Gage goes up for a catch against Paola last season. Gage and the Wildcats will square off the Panthers tonight in Paola with the Frontier League title and No. 1 seed in the playoffs on the line.

A league championship. The top seed in the state playoffs.

For most high school football players, this would be enough to get them fired up for a game. Don't get Louisburg wrong, they want both of those things when its squares off with rival Paola tonight, and the Wildcats are plenty juiced.

However, those things aren't at the root of why the Wildcats are looking forward to this matchup. You have to look a bit a deeper.

Last year, Louisburg's season came to an end thanks to Paola as the Panthers downed the Wildcats, 34-12, in Louisburg. It has been a feeling many of the players haven't been able to shake.

"We are all pumped for this game," Louisburg senior lineman Kiefer Tucker said. "We have all been looking forward to this game since last year when Paola ended our season. Everyone took that hard and it was the last time we have played with some of the guys.

"I remember when they ended our season in basketball, they chanted 'Just like football' and I know that really got me going through a lot of hard workouts just thinking about that."

There will probably be no love lost tonight when the two undefeated teams meet at 7 p.m. tonight at Paola High School. A rivalry, which brings plenty of interest no matter the record, will have a lot on the line.

The winner will be crowned Frontier League champion, will receive the No. 1 seed on the East side of the state playoffs – oh, and bragging rights for a year.

"I'm not going to lie, I was excited for this game last week," Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein said. "I am really looking forward to going out there, and playing in a high stakes game like this prior to the playoffs will be a great experience."

"Honestly, just beating Paola is enough. It is always our goal to win the game that is in front of us, and this one just so happens to have plenty on the line with it."

It will no doubt be the biggest challenge for Louisburg to date as Paola has dominated each of its previous seven opponents. The Panthers have racked up 295 points on the season, which is the second most points in Class 4A, and have had six different players rush for more than 100 yards in a game.

Quarterback Seth Richmond leads Paola on the season with 10 touchdowns, while running backs Connor Hasz and Garrett Williams each have six touchdowns a piece.

Paola is also strong defensively as it has allowed just 25 points and has five shutouts. The Panthers feature a lot of speed in the secondary and at linebacker, and have four interceptions for touchdowns on the season.

“Paola plays fast and hard, they fire out low on the line, and when they have the opportunity they take advantage of other team’s mistakes,” Ebenstein said. “They look to have some hard-nosed football players.”



Louisburg’s Austin Moore brings down a Paola runner during last season’s game.

As for Louisburg, the Wildcats will lean on running back Austin Moore, who has had a big season. Moore has rushed for 1,155 yards and has 18 touchdowns on the season.

Moore has found a lot of that success thanks to his offensive line. The Wildcats return four offensive linemen from their matchup a year ago, including seniors Noah Larson, Tucker, along with juniors Brayden White and Garrett Harding. Senior Jonathan DePriest has also made an impact as a first-year starter.

Fellow running back Blue Caplinger and tight end Michael Waldron have also created a lot of running room. Moore will also look to affect the game on defense at middle linebacker as he leads the team in tackles.

“Austin is having a great season with the help of the offensive line and the other backs blocking for him,” Ebenstein said. “When you put all those guys together, it makes for a tough offense to stop. I think Austin will have a huge impact on this game on both sides of the ball.”

Junior quarterback Madden Rutherford is also having a good season for Louisburg as he has thrown for 655 yards in the seven games and has nine touchdowns to just one interception.

Senior Brayden Gage and Caplinger have been his favorite targets as they have 170 and 125 yards receiving, respectively, and both have three touchdowns on the year.



Quarterback Madden Rutherford, along with linemen Noah Larson (54) and Kiefer Tucker (50) will try and find success against Paola tonight.

However, like most seasons, stats can be thrown out the window when it comes to these two teams playing each other. The Louisburg-Paola matchup hasn't had this much riding on it since 2010, when the two teams squared off in the sub-state championship and the Wildcats went on to win their first state title.

"It would mean a lot to win," Moore said. "No one on this team has ever won league and I think the last time Louisburg won league was back in 2010, so it would be pretty cool. I know this is will be the biggest game that I have ever been a part of in my life and I know it is going to be exciting."

The atmosphere at Panther Stadium tonight should speak for itself.

"One of the goals that we set during the preseason was that we didn't want to lose," Tucker said. "This will be a tough test, but I know that we can do it. I know if we go out and execute, and we just play our game, then we can beat them. It would mean a lot.

"It will be fun. I am assuming the stands are going to be crowded with the two towns being so close and it is a rivalry game. I can't wait to feel the energy out there and it will be a good game for sure."