

# Wildcats plunder Pirates to win regional championship



Senior Austin Moore (center) hands his Louisburg teammates the regional championship trophy Friday following the Wildcats' 48-0 win over Piper at Wildcat Stadium. Moore was injured in the first half of the game with a broken collarbone and is out for the rest of the season.

It had been almost two months since Louisburg and Piper squared off on the football field in what was one of the more entertaining games on the Wildcats' schedule.

Back in early September, Louisburg left Piper High School with a seven-point win – a victory that would help propel them to a Frontier League championship and a perfect regular season.

On Friday, the two teams squared off again and the stakes were a bit higher. The game, at least for Louisburg anyway, was even more exciting.

The Wildcats dominated action from the opening kickoff and never looked back in a 48-0 win over the Pirates. In the process, Louisburg won the school's first regional championship since 2016 and are off to a 10-0 start for the first time since 2010.

"We have preached all year that we need to continue to get better in practice every week," Louisburg coach Robert

Ebenstein said. "We played them to a seven-point game early in the season, and then to come here in week 10 and put 48 up and get the shutout, is a true testament to these kids. It is a testament that they have sold out and how hard they are willing to work."

The Wildcats showed their improvement throughout much of the game as they put up four touchdowns in each half and cruised to a win after winning a nail-biter earlier in the year.

"Friday's game was a real blast to just go out there and show to everyone how much we have improved since we played them earlier in the season," senior lineman Kiefer Tucker said. "I thought all around we were really clicking and then to be able to hold up the regional plaque at the end of the game was a great feeling as well."

As exciting as the win was for the Wildcats, the mood after the game was less than celebratory.

During the game, many of the players and coaches found out that team captain Austin Moore was lost for the rest of the season with a broken collarbone.

Moore, the team's leading rusher on offense and leading tackler on defense, has played big roles on both sides of the ball for the Wildcats this season and Louisburg is going to have to move forward in the playoffs without him on the field.

Moore sustained the injury in the second quarter when he caught a swing pass and was dragged down by three Piper defenders. He landed hard on the ground, but stayed in the game for the rest of the drive – a drive that included a 6-yard touchdown run by Moore that saw him shed tacklers and drag defenders into the endzone with that broken collarbone.



**Austin Moore fends off a Piper defender for a long run during the first half of Friday's game with Piper.**

He later went back out on defense to play for a series and told the coaches he didn't want to come out of the game. The coaching staff quickly realized something wasn't right.

"I didn't even realize Austin was injured in the moment," Ebenstein said. "He caught a little swing pass and the way he landed with three guys on top of him broke his collarbone. He didn't say anything and stayed in the game and actually carried the ball three more times and scored the touchdown on the same drive. After we scored Blue (Caplinger) and (Brayden) Gage both said you need to check on Austin. So I found him on the sideline and said 'You alright?' and he responded with 'Yeah I'm fine,' and went right back out on defense. So we watched him that defensive possession and he was favoring that arm just a little bit.

“It’s always a blow to lose any player, but a kid who leads like Austin will be a big loss. We love Austin and will miss him Friday night on the field for sure, but we are a solid team and it is next man up preparing for the next game.”

Even after losing Moore in the second quarter, the Wildcats continued to shine on both sides of the ball as they outscored the Pirates, 34-0, the rest of the way.

Quarterback Madden Rutherford came through for the Wildcats with three touchdowns on the ground, and another through the air, to lead the Louisburg offense.

Rutherford opened the game with a 1-yard touchdown run, and then after Moore’s touchdown in the second quarter, scored again on another quarterback sneak to put Louisburg up 21-0 late in the second quarter.



Senior Kiefer Tucker (50) pulls on the jersey to bring

**down a Piper player Friday in the regional championship game.**

On that drive, senior Blue Caplinger stepped up in Moore's absence as he made a leaping catch on third down for 29 yards, and then had a fourth down run to the 1-yard line to give Louisburg a first down – and then an eventual touchdown.

Kicker Drake Varns then helped give Louisburg the ball right back as he skipped the kickoff along the ground and allowed the Wildcats to recover the onside kick on the Piper 37-yard line with 2 minutes and 28 seconds left in the half.

Louisburg took advantage and scored its fourth touchdown of the half on a Brayden Gage 10-yard run and the Wildcats held a 28-0 lead at halftime.

The Wildcat defense made a big impact on the game as well as it forced four turnovers, including an interception by Caplinger to start the second half. Senior safety Tanner Belcher also had a big night with an interception, a fumble recovery and two deflected passes.

Louisburg's defensive line also made a difference as seniors Kiefer Tucker and Noah Larson each forced a fumble and junior Garrett Harding recovered the other fumble. Larson also recorded the game's only sack and junior linebacker Charlie Koontz led the Wildcats with seven tackles.

"Looking back, there probably could have been three or four more games to where we could have gotten shutouts, but we finally got to the point where we locked in to where every single person knew what their job was and we weren't giving up those huge plays," Ebenstein said. "I am super proud of those defensive kids, coach (Jeff) Lohse and all the position coaches for coaching it up all season."



**Safety Tanner Belcher (36) had a big night or Louisburg with an interception and a fumble recovery.**

The Wildcat offensive line also provided a lot of push up front as Larson, Tucker, Brayden White, Harding and Jonathan DePriest, along with tight end Michael Waldron, helped tally 388 yards of total offense.

Big plays dominated the second half for Louisburg as Caplinger broke free for a 20-yard touchdown in the third quarter and Rutherford followed that up with a 50-yard run up the middle for another score. Louisburg sealed the win late in the game when Rutherford found Brandon Cooper on an 80-yard touchdown pass.

“It is good to see all those guys start to mesh together,” Ebenstein said. ‘We are continuing to add plays, do new things and give new wrinkles and that is because they are focused. It is something that these kids work their butt off for and it is

all for them.”



**Senior Brayden Gage looks for some running room as he gets a block from teammate Blue Caplinger.**

The road to the state championship gets significantly harder this Friday when Louisburg hosts defending state champion Bishop Miege at 7 p.m. at Wildcat Stadium. The Stags have won four straight state titles and have had their way in Class 4A the last several years, including this season with a 76-8 win over Labette County to start the playoffs and a 49-20 victory over Pittsburg last week.

“We tell the kids every single day over summer weights that we train to beat the best and Miege has the track record that says they are pretty good,” Ebenstein said. “This is what we work for and we are going to come out and give em hell.”

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|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>LOU</b>   | <b>7</b> | <b>21</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>14</b> |
| <b>- 48</b>  |          |           |          |           |
| <b>PIP</b>   | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b> |           |
| <b>0 - 0</b> |          |           |          |           |

## **SCORING SUMMARY**

### **First quarter**

L: Madden Rutherford 1 run (Drake Varns kick)

### **Second quarter**

L: Austin Moore 6 run (Varns kick)

L: Rutherford 1 run (Varns kick)

L: Brayden Gage 10 run (Varns kick)

### **Third quarter**

L: Blue Caplinger 20 run (kick failed)

### **Fourth quarter**

L: Rutherford 50 run (Varns kick)

L: Brandon Cooper 80 pass from Rutherford (Varns kick)

## **STATISTICS**

RUSHING: Austin Moore 11-68, Madden Rutherford 11-68; Blue



Caplinger 13-59; Brayden Gage 5-31; Charlie Koontz 1-3

PASSING: Rutherford 5-11-165-1

RECEIVING: Brandon Cooper 1-80; Blue Caplinger 2-47; Austin Moore 2-39

TACKLES: Charlie Koontz 7, Brian Houck 5, Jorge LeBron 4, Blue Caplinger 4, Kiefer Tucker 4, Noah Larson 4, Garrett Harding 4, Beckett Rasmussen 3, Ben Wiedenmann 3, Jay Scollin 3, Tanner Belcher 3, James Foote 3, Brayden White 3, Gabe Rader 2, Michael Waldron 2, Austin Moore 2, Andrew Krause 2, Brandon Cooper 1, Dylan Knipp 1, Justin Collins 1, Jonathan DePriest 1.