

Wildcats to play underdog role against Bishop Miege



Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford hands the ball off to senior Blue Caplinger during the Wildcats' win over Piper last week. Louisburg will host defending state champion Bishop Miege tonight in the Class 4A sectional playoffs.

The Louisburg football team enters today's sectional playoff game with Bishop Miege as the No. 1 seed on the east side of the state and currently boasts a 10-0 record on the season.

Despite all that, the Wildcats are a heavy underdog.

Bishop Miege, the No. 1-ranked team in Class 4A, has won the last four state championships and has dominated 4A in the last decade, including a 76-8 win over Labette County and a 49-20 victory over Pittsburg so far in the playoffs. Last season, the Stags outscored their playoff opponents 230-60.

The Stags' only losses this season have come to the No. 1 team in Class 5A, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Missouri power, Rockhurst High School.

Despite all that, the Wildcats are excited for the opportunity to play one of the state's best teams on their home field. Kickoff for tonight's game is set for 7 p.m., in the sectional round of the playoffs. The winner of this game will meet the winner of Paola and Basehor-Linwood for the sub-state title.

"It is going to be awesome and the whole team is super excited," Louisburg senior Blue Caplinger said. "A lot of people have been saying, 'Oh, you are playing Miego, this is going to be your last game of the season.' I think we have some advantages too. Our field is an advantage, the snow and the cold, too, so I think that it will be a good game."

The Wildcats have put together a dominant season of its own as they have outscored their two playoff opponents, Ottawa and Piper, 104-8 the last two games.

"Our kids and coaches get excited for every game, but I would be lying if I said the focus this week wasn't a little bit different than some others we have had," Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein said. "Our kids are excited for the opportunity to play Miego and give them our best shot on our home field."

The Wildcats will have to account for a lot of weapons with the Bishop Miego offense and come up with their best performance of the season defensively.

Stag quarterback Sam Pedrotti leads the way with more than 1,700 yards passing and 19 touchdowns. Receivers Phillippe Wesley and Hudson Bentley each have more than 600 yards receiving and seven and five touchdowns, respectively.

Running back Brison Cobbins is another weapon for the Stags with nearly 1,000 yards on the ground and 16 touchdowns. The Stags also have a big offensive line that the Wildcat defensive front is going to have to deal with.

Defensively, Miego linebacker Dylan Downing is one of the best players in the state with 100 tackles on the season, including 10 for a loss. Defensive lineman Jalen Williams is also a big factor with 17 tackles for a loss and a team-high 11 sacks.

Louisburg realizes Miego will be the toughest team it has faced all season and it will be playing at a disadvantage at

times.

"When you watch them on film, they are just solid all around," Ebenstein said. "They have good schemes and amazing athletes all over the field. Every one of their players only play one side of the football and they never look tired. When a starter does go out, the person who replaces them never seems to be a downgrade.

"They also have about 18 coaches on the sidelines, and with players only playing one side of the ball, they make adjustments very well and have plenty of coaches on the sideline who can coach it up by position, which is tough for us. For example, when our quarterback comes off the field our QB coach (Jeff Lohse) is calling the defense so he never really has that chance to talk to him from a position coach perspective. It is just one of the many differences schools like Miego have that public schools are not granted."

The Wildcats will also be without their leading rusher and tackler, Austin Moore, who was injured last week with a broken collarbone. Sophomore Ben Wiedenmann will fill in at running back and linebacker for Moore.

Still, the Wildcats have plenty of depth at the running back position with seniors Blue Caplinger and Brayden Gage, who have been big contributors all season.

Quarterback Madden Rutherford has been a steady presence for Louisburg as he has thrown for almost 1,100 yards and 14 touchdowns. He also has four more scores on the ground.

However for the Wildcats to be effective, it all starts up front with a veteran offensive line of Kiefer Tucker, Brayden White, Noah Larson, Garrett Harding and Jonathan DePriest.

"The play on the line is going to be huge," White said. "We need to be able to have a run game and we need to be able to mix it up a little with the pass too. But the run game is

going to be big for us, especially in the wet, soggy grass.

“It is going to be hard to replace someone like Austin. He is a big part of our team and he has probably given the most out of anyone here. I think Ben is going to do really good and I think he is going to surprise people and Austin has been supporting him the whole way.”

The Wildcats are hoping for a big crowd tonight at Wildcat Stadium, similar to the one they saw in Paola when they captured the Frontier League crown less than a month ago.

“Our community has been so supportive this season and their support at every home game is very much appreciated,” Ebenstein said. “Looking up and seeing those bleachers packed every home game is just a reminder of how amazing this community is and how much this school and team is supported.

“The Paola game also is another example that place was crazy that type of atmosphere could be a huge advantage against a team like Miego as they like to call and check almost every play at the line of scrimmage. As for being the underdog, we will take it. Nobody thought we would be league champions but we are. Nobody thought we were going to beat Paola, but we did, and now nobody thinks we will beat Miego.”

It is that underdog mentality that the Wildcats hope to use in their favor tonight against the highly-favored Stags.

“Honestly I think every coach and every player on our team believes we will win this game,” Ebenstein said. “Miego is an amazing team, and their track record proves they are, and have been one of the best teams in the state of Kansas over the past five years. The good news is we don’t have to beat them every week, we only have to beat them this week.

“I think we have a good plan to get that done, and a team full of kids working their butt off to carry out that plan. Those nerves are always there for me personally, but once kickoff

comes, everything just settles in and we play the game.”