

Louisburg girls soccer has high aspirations after state runner-up finish



Louisburg junior Mackenzie Scholtz led the Wildcat girls soccer team in scoring last season with 32 goals and hopes to do the same this year. Scholtz and the Wildcats open their season Tuesday at home against Harmon.

Entering its fourth year of existence, the Louisburg girls soccer team has already set a high bar for itself.

The Wildcats advanced to the state semifinals in back-to-back seasons, and they made it to the championship match last year against Bishop Miege and finished as a state runner-up. Despite all that success, there are a couple things Louisburg has yet to accomplish.

Other than a state championship, the Wildcats have yet to garner that allusive Frontier League title and that is their first of many aspirations as they enter the 2019 season.

“We have our team goals, but this year we want to focus on competing for a league title,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We were close in the past, but unfortunately not close enough. We play in one of the best 4A soccer leagues in Kansas and it is always a tough test

each and every night. We have our work cut out for us, but this team is capable of being special as long as they continue to play for each other.”

Louisburg has a good opportunity to do that, even though the Frontier League has added three new schools to its slate. The Wildcats return a bulk of their players from their state team a year ago as they try to make a run at a league crown.

The team may feature a little different look, however, as it will have to replace the program’s all-time leading scorer in Bailey Belcher. Belcher was a big part of the Wildcats’ success as she controlled the middle of the field and drew a lot of attention from opposing defenses.

“Losing Bailey is going to leave some big shoes to fill,” Conley said. “In our existence as a program, she is the most decorated player we have ever had. We understand what she meant to this team and program, but we have some girls ready to step up and play their game. It will be fun to watch this team grow and mature. I think this team could potentially be more dangerous offensively than we were last year.”

A big reason for that optimism is forward Mackenzie Scholtz. The Louisburg junior had a big season up top for the Wildcats as she led the team with 32 goals on the year and had 15 assists in 21 games. She was also a first team all-league and all-state player and Conley believes she is poised to have another big season.

“Mac has had a fantastic first two years

in our program,” Conley said. “She has set the bar incredibly high for herself.

I think this year, she will truly show what kind of player she is. She has

worked hard to get stronger in the off-season and it has shown with her play

throughout our preseason. She will be able to show everyone what type of

player she truly is and I think she is ready for that challenge.”

As dangerous as the Wildcats appear to be

up top, they are pretty balanced across the pitch, including with their back

line.



Senior Kaitlyn Lewer is one of two returning all-league players to lead the Louisburg defense.

Seniors Kaitlyn Lewer and Camdyn Clark return to anchor the Louisburg defense as both players earned all-league honors a year ago and Lewer was a second-team all-state player. Junior

Skylar Bowman, senior Julianne Finley and sophomore Madison Quinn also figure to see time in the back.

Junior Hannah Straub, who started last season, will have to miss time due to injury to start the season, but Conley hopes to have her back later in the year.

In the midfield, junior Erin Lemke will help lead that spot as she was second team all-state and all-league selection a season ago. Lemke had 12 goals last season and five assists and is one of the team's top returning scorers.

Seniors Leia Shaffer and Hallie Hutsell, juniors Trinity Moore, Haley Cain, Avery O'Meara, Morgan Messer and sophomore Olivia Barber also figure to see a lot of time in the midfield as several players started or saw a lot of varsity action in 2018. Moore, who was an all-league player on defense last year, will see more action in the middle.



Junior Erin Lemke, who scored 12 goals for Louisburg last season, will look to help lead the midfield this year.

“This group of girls are returning a lot of senior and junior experience, with some talented underclassmen sprinkled in,”

Conley said. “With all the injuries we faced last year, a lot of players got an opportunity to get their feet wet. This year, they will get their shot. A lot of these girls have been starting since they joined our program. It is important we show what type of team we are and let these girls create their own impact on our program.

“I think our midfield will be pretty solid as well as our experienced defense. It will be interesting to see when it’s all said and down which group stands out the best. If these groups push each

other like I know

they can at practice this group is going to be a lot of fun to watch.”

The Wildcats will have a new look in goal this year as senior Carson Buffington takes over for a three-year starter in Shay Whiting. Buffington did see some varsity time last season and Conley is excited to see what his new goalie can do on a full-time basis.

“Carson will have some big shoes to fill this season, but I think she is more than capable,” he said. “She got some starts last year and showed what we can expect from her. She has grown so much since playing soccer for the first time as a sophomore. Her work ethic is second to none. We have high expectations for her this season, because of those factors.”

Louisburg will begin the 2019 season Tuesday when it hosts Harmon for a 6 p.m. matchup. That is when the Wildcats begin their journey to what they hope is another state semifinal berth, but they also realize it gets more and more difficult every year.

“I think whenever you have such a historic run like that girls have the past two years you need to appreciate it and reflect on it, but this is a new season,” Conley said. “No one is going to fear us, and everyone is going to be prepared for us. For a lot of the schools we play, we will be their biggest game. The girls need to be prepared for everyone’s best shot day in and day out.”

“We have talked a lot about living in the moment and making the most of our opportunities. This group of girls have a great opportunity to do something special, but it’s on them. They need to be mentally ready for a long season and prepared to deal with any adversity that might be thrown at them.”