

# Wildcat baseball ready to take step forward this season



Louisburg junior Madden Rutherford is one of several returning starters for the Wildcat baseball team this season. Rutherford earned second team all-league honors a season ago.

The Louisburg baseball team had its ups and downs during the 2018 season as the Wildcats finished with a 7-15 record.

Although the Wildcats didn't have as much success as they would have liked, they used that time as a learning tool for a lot of underclassmen – many of which are back this season.

Louisburg lost just two starters from last year's squad and the Wildcats are poised to take a step forward in 2019 as they hope some of that youth turns into experience.

"Having this group back with another year of experience under their belt is great," Louisburg coach Joel McGhee said. "Many had good seasons last year and are looking to improve on where they were a season ago. The experience will help us offensively and defensively. We have some versatile guys that can help us in multiple positions. They are a hard

working group that is passionate about the game.”

The Wildcats return a pair of All-Frontier League players from last season, including the team’s No. 1 starter, junior Madden Rutherford.

In six starts, Rutherford had a 5.12 ERA and struck out 23 batters in 28 innings pitched. He also committed just three errors in 19 games. At the plate, he had a .408 average with 10 RBIs, three doubles, a triple, a home run and scored 15 runs.

Junior Garrett Harding also made an impact in the Wildcat lineup last season after earning honorable mention all-league honors and he hopes to do the same this year.



**Louisburg junior Garrett Harding was one of the Wildcats' top offensive players last season.**

In 21 games, Harding led the Wildcats with a .418 average and finished the season with 23 hits, a double, a grand slam and 20 RBIs. On the mound, he had 2.47 earned run average in 11 innings of work and defensively he committed just one error.

Several Wildcats will play multiple positions this season as seniors Beckett Rasmussen and Chase Norton will split time behind the plate at catcher. Fellow senior Noah Larson will be a regular at first base and senior Michael Rogers will see a lot of time at second base.

Rutherford, senior Logan McClellan and Rasmussen will man the shortstop position, while Harding, Andrew Krause or Rutherford will play third depending on pitching matchups.

Jakob Krause, Rutherford, Rasmussen, McClellan, Andrew Krause and A.J. Drew will all see time in the outfield.

"Offensively we are returning a majority of our run producers from last season," McGhee said. "Garrett Harding, Madden Rutherford, and Noah Larson all did a great job at the plate last season driving in runs. Logan McClellan and Jakob Krause did a great job on the base paths and we look for them to continue to excel there. We have the potential to do some good

things. As long as we take a good approach at the plate, and take advantage of fastball counts, we should do some good things.”

On the mound, Rutherford will look to lead a veteran staff that includes Jakob Krause, Harding, McClellan and Andrew Krause. The Wildcats may also look to some younger arms to contribute as well in junior Kaden Oehlert and sophomores Trevin Lohse and A.J. Drew.

“We will have some younger arms joining the group as our season progresses and we work to manage the pitch count requirements set out by the state,” McGhee said. “Several others may see time throughout the season as well. We are returning some quality arms that put in a lot of innings last season and faced some challenges. These have hopefully spurred growth and a drive to compete even more.”



**Louisburg senior Noah Larson will be the team's regular first baseman this season.**

It has already been a rough start to the season for the Wildcats as they have only been able to practice outdoors twice during the first three weeks of practice due to the cold weather and snow.

"It has been a challenge this spring to get good work in," McGhee said. "We have been able to get outside twice since the beginning the season, with Monday being our first opportunity to get on to the field and get good work in. Being indoors is never ideal, but we feel like we have gotten in good work.

"We have taken a lot of cuts in the cage and spent quality time on our mounds. Fielding is our biggest challenge when indoors, but we look for ways to work on some of the details. However the gym floor never really prepares you for the bad hop. We are ready to go, but the inability to get good

reps on the field has us all a bit on edge.”

Louisburg opens its season at 4:30 p.m. today when it travels to

Piper for a doubleheader and it is the first of three straight road appearances

for the Wildcats to start the season. Louisburg will host Wellsville in its

home opener on April 4.