

Wildcats advance to state semis for third straight year



The Louisburg girls soccer team celebrates its 3-0 win over Kansas City Christian on Tuesday at Wildcat Stadium. The Wildcats' win in the state quarterfinals puts them in the state semifinals for the third consecutive season.

The celebration was a little more muted this time around.

For the third straight season, the Louisburg girls soccer team earned a spot in the Class 4-3-2-1A state semifinals after the Wildcats' 3-0 victory over Kansas City Christian on Tuesday in Louisburg.

The finish was anti-climatic, unlike the past two years where the Wildcat secured a semifinal berth with golden goals. Tuesday's match might not have had the same excitement, but Louisburg is thrilled to be able to reach the state's final four for the third year in a row.

"It is a lot of fun," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "This was our goal, and that is what the kids wanted, which was to get back and try and do better than they did last

year. I appreciate the kids and their effort and it is really cool. It is powerful and it is a tribute to the kids and how hard they play.

“The kids just go at it every day and it is just an incredible run they have been on. There aren’t many teams in the state that can say they have been to the state tournament three years in a row.”

Louisburg, which defeated Kansas City Christian 6-0 earlier in the season, went up against a more determined Panther team this time around. The Panthers got the first shot on goal and nearly had the game’s first score, but goalie Carson Buffington got the save.

It also took a little time for the Wildcat attack to get going, but Louisburg was able find the back of the net 13 minutes into the match.

Junior Mackenzie Scholtz scored her first of two goals after junior Avery O’Meara sent a long pass over the Panther defense and Scholtz raced to the ball and beat the Panther goalie for the score.

Ten minutes later, the Wildcats struck again. Junior Erin Lemke sent a through ball to fellow junior Morgan Messer, who found the back of the net and the Wildcats took their 2-0 lead into halftime.



Junior Mackenzie Scholtz races down the field on Kansas City Christian on Tuesday at Wildcat Stadium.

Despite the lead, it wasn't the type of play the Wildcats were looking for.

"The first half we had no purpose and we were just kicking the ball," Conley said. "The second half, we moved the ball and were attacking a lot more. We had plenty of good chances, we just couldn't bury one. The second half was much better and we did a good job to get back on track."

Defensively, the Wildcats were stingy in giving the Panthers opportunities to score. Buffington recorded her eighth shutout in the last nine matches.

"I know we came out with a win, but I know we could have done a lot better," Buffington said. "We probably could have beaten them by a little bit more, but we are just going to have to keep our heads straight, especially with the semifinals coming

up.

“We were just more focused last time around when we played them. I think we were playing hard this time, but I don’t think we played as smart as we could have like coach said.”



Louisburg defender Kaitlyn Lewer clears the ball out of the back Tuesday at Wildcat Stadium.

Louisburg controlled possession in the second half and had several opportunities on goal. One of those found the net as sophomore Olivia Barber played a through ball to Scholtz and she put the shot away for the game’s third goal.

The Wildcats also had the opportunity to play on the new turf at Wildcat Stadium, and while the team had been practicing on it, it still took some getting used after playing on grass most of the season.

“It was nice,” Conley said of the turf. “It was fast, actually it was really fast. I think our girls struggled a little bit with it. When we are playing on grass, the ball likes to hold up a little bit and we are ok to go. On here the ball just takes off and it is a really quick surface. I think it will be good for us moving forward and help us prepare for the surface out at state.”



Sophomore Olivia Barber (10) wins a 50-50 opportunity with the help of teammate Trinity Moore on Tuesday.

Louisburg (16-3) will square off with Topeka-Hayden (13-4-2) in the state semifinals at 5 p.m. today at Hummer Sports Complex in Topeka.

The Wildcats knocked off Hayden, 1-0, in last year's state semifinal game and the Wildcats realize nothing is going to be easy from here on out.

"We have our work cut out for us,"

Conley said. "They are a really good group of teams and the ones in the West are pretty solid. We are just going to have to bear down and hopefully our experience kicks in and we understand what it is expected.

"Hopefully their heads are right in regards to our expectation and what the state atmosphere is like. We are experienced enough where I don't think we will have that deer in the headlights look anymore. We have to play a much better game and be more aggressive."

The winner of that match will play the winner between Buhler (15-4) and Bishop Miege (11-7-1) at 2 p.m. on Saturday in the championship match. The loser of each game will play for third at noon.

"I want to play in the championship game and win state and the other girls feel the same way," Buffington said. "It would be amazing to win a state title, but we are going to have to play well."