

Wildcat football ready to defend Frontier League title



Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford hands the ball off to junior Ben Wiedenmann during a workout over the summer. The Wildcats open their season Friday at Spring Hill.

It was one of those special years for Louisburg football that doesn't come along very often.

The Wildcats won their first 10 games in 2018, captured a Frontier League title and finished with a regional championship, before defending state champion Bishop Miege came calling and ended the Wildcats' season.

Last year may be hard to replicate, especially after losing 18 seniors, but the Wildcats have the pieces to make a lot of noise in the Frontier League once again.

Louisburg has close to 70 players out this season, which is the most since head coach Robert Ebenstein has been involved with the program, and the Wildcats have 10 seniors this year that will be looked to fill the leadership left behind from last year's group.

"So far practices have been going very well," Ebenstein said. "We have some holes

to fill from last year's roster, but the guys have been working very hard and are ready to fill those spots.

"We return 13 letterman with 8 individuals who started a game on offense and 6 individuals who started a game on defense. We will be younger with some new faces, but we have many kids who are ready to take that step up and compete at the varsity level."

One constant is third-year quarterback Madden Rutherford, who will once again lead the Wildcat offense. The Louisburg senior threw for more than 1,100 yards last season and had 14 touchdowns.

Rutherford

is also a threat to take off and run as he recorded 354 yards on the ground and had four touchdowns a year ago as a second-team All-Frontier League player. He also earned an all-league first team as a punter.

"Returning

a quarterback is always a blessing, but when you can bring back a kid who is starting for his third season, it is a huge advantage," Ebenstein said. "He is the smartest football player I have ever coached and knows our offensive system inside and out. He knows his job, he knows every route the receivers run and he knows all the blocking assignments the backs have. Honestly, he knows most all of the offensive line responsibilities as well."



Louisburg head coach Robert Ebenstein is in his third season leading the Wildcats.

That offensive line will have a little different look from a year ago. Returning are all-league players Brayden White and Garrett Harding, and the Wildcats seniors will anchor that front along with fellow senior tight end Michael Waldron.

White, who was a first-team All-Frontier League selection a year ago, will lead the way at tackle and Harding will be a fixture at guard. Seniors Ian McGuire, Sam Kratochvil, along with juniors Andy Hupp, Eli Johnson and sophomore Dominic Owens are new faces who could help the Wildcats up front this season.

Louisburg lost three off that line from last season, including Kiefer Tucker, who was an All-Frontier League first team player on both sides of ball. Still, Ebenstein

likes what he has coming back to help pave the way up front.

“Our offensive line will have some new faces, but should be a dominant force,” Ebenstein said. “We have smart football kids all over the field and we will have the most athletic offensive line we have had in a long time. We might not be as big as we have in the past, but our speed up front will be a strength.

“Being able to zone our opponents, and double off and be able to pick up those quick linebackers, will be a strength of ours. Also having Waldron return at tight end is a plus as well as his blocking, and knowledge of the system, is outstanding.”



Senior Michael Waldron hauls in a catch during the team’s camp over the summer.

The Wildcats also have a stable of running backs to be able to get through those holes. Gone is All-League first-teamer Austin Moore, who is now with the Kansas State football program, but Ebenstein will have plenty have plenty to choose from to help fill the void.

Senior Charlie Koontz and junior Ben Wiedenmann both saw varsity time last season, and will lead the way in 2019. Juniors Justin Collins, Jay Scollin and sophomore Kolby Kattau will also see time in the backfield.

“This year our running backs will look a lot different,” Ebenstein said. “We lost some quality kids, but some tough kids are ready to take those spots. All of those guys will be in the backfield this year and all do certain things very well. You should be hearing many names called out over the speakers this season. This is, by far, is the fastest backfield we have had in Louisburg since I have been here.”

Defense was a staple for the Wildcats a year ago, and that helped them to an undefeated league title. Although they have spots to fill, the Wildcats still figure to be strong in that area as well.

Hupp, Koontz, Kattau and sophomore Brandon Doles will all see a lot of time at the linebacker spot, while Hupp and Koontz are both returning starters at the position. White and Harding will anchor the middle of the defensive line as returning starters.

Wiedenmann will bring some speed off the edge from the defensive end spot, while Johnson, senior Andrew Krause and Owens will see time at defensive end.

In the secondary, Waldron, along with juniors Weston Guetterman, Collins, Konnor Vohs and Ben Guetterman will all see action in the defensive backfield.

Assistant coach Jeff Lohse is also returning as the team's defensive coordinator as he guided the Wildcats to one of Class 4A's top defenses a year ago.

"With Lohse calling the defense, I am always confident in our defense to be in the right spots and make plays," Ebenstein said. "Schematically, it will look similar to the Louisburg defenses over the years, but we will have some new faces for sure.

"Our defensive line should be a strength of ours with Harding and White anchoring the middle and I think Ben Wiedenmann could possibly be one of the fastest defensive ends in the state."

The Wildcats also return both of their kickers on special teams as senior Drake Varns will resume his placekicking duties, while Rutherford is the team's punter.

The Frontier League will provide a lot of competition for the Wildcats again this season, including rival Paola, which is one of the favorites to win the league crown.

Still, Louisburg hopes to figure into that conversation at the end of the year and make a run in the state playoffs. It all starts Friday when the Wildcats travel to Spring Hill for their season opener.

"Our expectations are always the same," Ebenstein said. "We want to get better every practice, be prepared for every game, and represent this team in the best light we can.

"The Frontier League is tough week in and week out. There are no easy games in this league, but right now I am really only concerned with Spring Hill and leaving that game, 1-0."