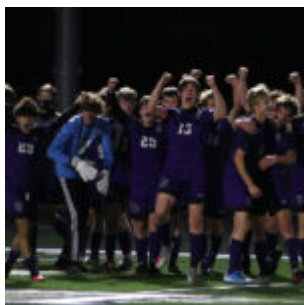


Wildcats down Baldwin to advance to state semis; sets up match with Bishop Miege



The Louisburg boys soccer team celebrates its 3-0 win over Baldwin on Tuesday in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal game.

For the first time since 2016, the Louisburg boys soccer team will be playing on the season's final weekend.

Louisburg used a big second half to defeat Baldwin, 3-0, in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals on Tuesday at Wildcat Stadium. That win propelled Louisburg to the state final four and are guaranteed a state placing come Saturday.

"They earned this," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "They work hard every practice, every game and every summer. They 100 percent earned this.

"I couldn't be prouder of our group. They had a goal to go undefeated and go to state. We had one blemish. They are undefeated Frontier League champions, regional champions and now they are going to get a banner for going to state. It is up to them to see what we put on it."

The win, which improved their record to 15-1 on the season, gave the Wildcats the No. 1 seed at the Class 4-1A state tournament and will face off with four-time defending state champion, Bishop Miege, at 4 p.m. on Friday in Wichita.

Still, getting to this point in the season wasn't easy for the Wildcats and Baldwin made things difficult on Louisburg. It was the third time the two teams had squared off, with Louisburg winning the first one in overtime and won the second by a 2-0 result in Baldwin.

This match was scoreless at halftime, but the Wildcats got some good looks and started to convert on them in the second half. Sophomore Cade Gassman scored three times to record the hat trick in the second half and helped the Wildcats advance to the next round.

"We knew coming in that Baldwin was a tough opponent, but very beatable as we beat them twice in the regular season," Gassman said. "The first half was back and forth, but when the second half started the opportunities came and I capitalized off their mistakes finding the back of the net.

"It means a lot to me and the team to make it to the final four, to see all that hard work in the off season pay off and reaching our goals that we made at the beginning of the season. It feels incredible."



Louisburg sophomore Cade Gassman celebrates his first of three goals Tuesday in the second half against Baldwin.

Gassman scored his first goal with 33 minutes left in the match as he took a loose ball in the box and found the back of the net. Four minutes later, Gassman struck again as he took the ball down the right side and finished with a shot to the left corner.

Then, with seven minutes remaining, Gassman sealed the victory with his final goal and help send the Wildcats to the state final four.

In the first half, the Wildcats had their looks, but couldn't find the back of the net. When they converted the first one in the second half, things started to change.

"It was a very competitive and intense game," Louisburg junior captain Braden Yows said. "Both teams played hard in every

position on the field. I think our depth wore them down in the second half, but they made us play for 80 minutes. It is always nice when you can play with a lead, and having one let us play with more confidence.”

Defense also provided the Wildcats with a spark as sophomore goalie Mack Newell earned another shutout and had seven saves on the night.

Louisburg also got strong play from its back line, especially junior Michael Seuferling, who caused Baldwin fits from his outside back position. Toby-Espina Roca, Luke Faulkner, Ethan Showalter, Hunter Rogers and Isaac Guetterman also made big plays throughout the night.



Junior Isaac Guetterman sends the ball up field during Tuesday's state quarterfinal match.

“Michael Seuferling is the best outside back in the league,”

Conley said. "No one goes at him because he is the best. If someone wants to go ahead and come at him, that is fine. That works out great for us."

The Wildcats put 13 shots on goal against the Baldwin defense, including five from Yows, who also had an assist on one of Gassman's goals. Gassman and Colin McManigal each had three shots, while Treston Carlson and Ethan Ptacek each had one.

Now, the Wildcats begin to prepare for their toughest test of the season – Bishop Miego. Louisburg will go up against the 4-time defending state champion at 4 p.m. Friday at Stryker Soccer Complex in Wichita.

"Obviously Miego is the gold standard having won four consecutive state championships, and nine overall," Yows said. "We are going to have to come out and play with the same effort we have been playing with all season. There are four great teams down there who have had really good seasons. We just need to play unselfish soccer and convert our chances when we get them. We are all very excited and hope to do well, but of course the state title is our goal."



Sophomore midfielder Ethan Ptacek races down the sideline against Baldwin on Tuesday.

It will also be a rematch of the state quarterfinal game a year ago, in which Stags defeated Louisburg, 3-0, and from that day the Wildcats set a goal to reach the state semifinals.

Now the objective is to win a state championship, and once again, the Wildcats will have to go through Bishop Miego to get there.

"The boys have been focused and prepared each and every day," Conley said. "Everything we have gone through has prepared us for this moment. I am so honored to be able to coach these boys and watch them grow throughout the season. This is a special group.

"Miego is Miego. They are one of the best teams in 4A-1A every

year regardless of what their record is. They are well coached and their history speaks for them. Bishop Miege has won 20 regionals titles, 6 of the last 8 state titles including the last 4 state titles in 4A-1A. Everyone knows how good they are and how rich their history is. This year's team has two of the most dynamic forwards we will see and overall a team packed with speed and talent. They are organized and play soccer the way it's meant to be played. This will be an incredible challenge for the boys and we are looking forward to it."

No. 2 Rose Hill and No 3. Wichita-Trinity will play in the other semifinal game Friday. On Saturday, the third place game will take place at noon and the championship match will follow at 3 p.m.