

Wildcats fall short against rival Paola on Senior Night



Louisburg seniors Aiden Barker (54) and Brandon Doles team up to stop Paola running back Jovanni Blackie at the line of scrimmage Friday at Wildcat Stadium.

Down two scores going into halftime, Louisburg needed a jump start offensively and the Wildcats got it Friday at home against rival Paola.

The Wildcats took the opening drive of the second half and scored on a fourth down. The momentum seemed to be on their side.

However, two more fourth downs didn't quite the Wildcats' way.

Louisburg failed to score on a fourth and goal from the 2 on its next drive and the Panthers took advantage. Paola used that opportunity to score its third touchdown of the game and hand Louisburg a 21-7 loss in its annual rivalry game.

The Wildcats tried to get back in the contest, but two turnovers threw a wrench in those plans. Louisburg finished its regular season with a 4-4 record and earned a No. 9 seed in the state playoffs.

It was also Senior Night for the Wildcats and the final time Brandon Doles, Aiden Barker, Tom Koontz, Kolby Kattau, Luis Rios, Terrance Foster, Liam DeVary, Gavin Whisenhunt, Bryce Gage and Reid Justesen will play on their home field.

Although their season isn't over, it was a tough loss to take for many of the Wildcats.



Louisburg quarterback Declan Battle makes a pass over a Paola defender Friday at Wildcat Stadium.

"We got the ball again to the 1 but couldn't get in, then you have a fumble and an interception and it goes downhill from there," Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein said. "You can't do that against a good team."

"They are a good team obviously and (Paola) coach (Mike) Dumpert is a good coach and he has been around forever. You have to be on top of your game. That first half we lost two offensive players and that kind of put us in a shuffle to try and figure it out. We went into halftime and made a plan and we came out and executed."

It didn't start well for the Wildcats as Paola scored on the

game's opening play on a 80-yard run by Caden Rhamy.

Louisburg was down 13-0 at halftime and the Wildcats couldn't find any rhythm offensively. That changed in the second half.

The Wildcats took the opening drive of the third quarter down to the 3-yard line. On a fourth-and-goal from the 3, quarterback Declan Battle scrambled to find Jase Hovey for a touchdown.



Freshman running back Ashton Moore leaps over a Paola defender Friday at home.

The drive was helped by a couple 20-yard passes to receiver Mason Dobbins and 15 yard passes to Caden Caplinger and Ashton Moore.

Dobbins, who normally has a height advantage over his opponent, was shadowed by Paola's Trey Moala as both are

around 6-6. Still, Dobbins was able to get going in the second half and had 59 yards receiving.

"We had to be careful where we were sending him (Dobbins) and we were trying to get their big corner's hips to open up and put the ball on Mason," Ebenstein said. "We did that in the second half, but we didn't capitalize on the chances we had."

The Wildcat defense came up big and forced a Paola punt and Louisburg drove the ball down the field again.

After a roughing the passer penalty called on Paola, Moore broke free for a 26-yard run. Then Battle, on third down, scrambled for a 20-yard keeper.

Louisburg eventually got down to the 2-yard line. Then on a fourth-and-goal from the 2, the Panther defense stuffed Battle short of the end zone, preventing another Wildcat score.

That defensive stance propelled the Paola offense. The Panthers drove 99 yards for touchdown that ended on a 12-yard run from Moala early in the fourth quarter to put Paola up 21-7.

On that drive, Paola faced a fourth down choice of its own as it had a fourth and inches from their own 10-yard line. The Panthers decided to go for it and Moala got the first down on a quarterback keeper.

"They took that and went 99 yards," Ebenstein said. "That is tough to bounce back from. That is their style and they are good team. If it is fourth and less than 2 they are probably going for it. That is what they did. We were there on the play to stop it, but they have a 6-6 quarterback and all he had to do was lean forward."



Louisburg junior Jase Hovey stretches out to bring down Paola quarterback Trey Moala on Friday. Hovey led the Wildcats with a team-high 29 tackles.

The next two Louisburg drives resulted in a fumble and an interception that helped seal the win for Paola.

Defensively, junior Jase Hovey was all over the field from his safety spot. Hovey finished the game with 29 tackles, including 18 solo stops.

Linebackers Brandon Doles and Nathan Vincent were also active with 18 and 15 tackles, respectively. Junior lineman J.R. Rooney also had double digit tackles with 10.

“That drive for 99 killed us,” Ebenstein said. “Paola has some big kids. They have three senior lineman, a couple senior running back, a senior quarterback and a senior receiver. Those guys played like seniors and we have some guys that

played like sophomores because we are a young team. We are getting better and we have another week of practice, so we will see what we can put together.”

Louisburg will face its toughest challenge yet as the Wildcats will travel to meet No. 8 seed St. James Academy in the first round of the playoffs. St. James is the defending Class 4A state champion and also ended Louisburg’s season a year ago.

Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. at Bishop Miega High School and Ebenstein knows the challenge ahead for his team.

“They are very good, and to be honest they look better this year than they did last year, but I know we are better as well and much more well rounded,” Ebenstein said. “This year from what I have seen they battled some injuries early, but then bounced back to give St. Pius X (Missouri) their only loss on the season, then beat Blue Valley Southwest, Blue Valley North, and then last week beat Bishop Miega by three possessions.

“When you watch film on most 4A schools you can find a weakness or a tendency that you can exploit, teams like St. James do not have those weaknesses, so you have to make sure you have a balanced approach and try to take away their strengths while not exploiting yourself. They have multiple kids that are receiving interest from Division I and II programs. So we have to be sure that we have a clean game plan on both sides of the ball and be able to have success running our basic stuff and keep the chains moving and keep their offense off the field for as long as possible.”

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SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

P: Caden Rhamy 80 run (kick good)

Second quarter

P: Trey Moala 2 run (kick failed)

Third quarter

L: Jase Hovey 3 pass from Declan Battle (Layne Ryals kick)

Fourth quarter

P: Moala 12 run (2-point conversion good)

STATISTICS

RUSHING – Ashton Moore 6-54; Declan Battle 15-41

PASSING – Declan Battle 16-30-144

RECEIVING – Mason Dobbins 5-59; Caden Caplinger 4-55; Ashton Moore, 2-14; Jackson Kush 1-8; Kolby Kattau 1-4; Jase Hovey 1-3

TACKLES – Jase Hovey 29, Brandon Doles 18, Nathan Vincent 15, J.R. Rooney 10, Carson Wade 4, Tom Koontz 4, Jackson Howard 4, Kolby Kattau 3, Aiden Barker 3, Will Hutsell 3, Hunter Heinrich 2, Layne Ryals 2