

Experienced Wildcats ready for another postseason run



Louisburg's Cade Gassman is one of 15 seniors of the Wildcat soccer team this season. Gassman is the team's top returning player as he was a first-team all-league and all-state performer.

The sting from last season's loss to Bishop Miege in the regional finals is still there for the Louisburg boys soccer team.

The Wildcats, who were the No. 1 seed in the state playoffs, fell to the eventual state champion in a tightly-played match and saw their season come to a close.

It is a loss many of the current players remember – mainly because many of them were a big part of the team.

Louisburg returns 15 seniors, nine of which saw varsity time at different points last season as the Wildcats went on to earn a share of the Frontier League title.

The Wildcats know experience will be key if they want to make a deep run in the postseason.

"They absolutely want that final run at a state title," Bovaird said. "They've had a taste of success two years ago, and they've swallowed the bitter pill of a disappointing defeat last year. We're looking at bringing home a fourth straight Frontier League title, as well as making a push for

that elusive championship. This senior class is special, and I believe they can aim high and hit the mark.”

The Wildcat senior class is a large one, and many of those players have played big roles in the team’s previous successes.

Bovaird, who is in his first year as the team’s head coach after he replaced Kyle Conley, feels grateful to have a wealth of experience to work with.

“Having 15 seniors is a rare treat, I imagine, and I feel a little spoiled,” Bovaird said. “I’m very fortunate to be able to step into this role and to have such great leadership from these guys. Many of them will be 4-year letterwinners, and there are a significant number who saw playing time two years ago when we finished third at state. They play club soccer year-round and are bringing in a lot of excellent experience.”



Louisburg’s Gavin York goes up for a header against the Bishop Miege last season. York is a team captain this year, along with Cade Gassman and Matthew Sword.

The head of that group is senior Cade Gassman, who enters this

season as a four-year varsity starter. Gassman was a first-team all-league and all-state selection as a junior as he finished with 11 goals and nine assists.

Gassman was selected as a team captain, along with fellow seniors Gavin York and Matthew Sword. York was a big piece of the varsity lineup last season at the forward spot and Sword was an honorable mention all-league selection on defense.

“Cade is a very charismatic leader, and one thing I love about him is how he inspires all his teammates – younger and older,” Bovaird said. “Sometimes I joke about how obnoxiously enthusiastic he can be, but the thing is – it works. He’s a ‘life-giver’ with his attitude and his daily approach to soccer. He loves the game, has incredible talent, and sets a high bar for leadership.

“He’s going to be joined by seniors Gavin York and Matthew Sword as captains this year. Between the three of them, not only do they have exceptional soccer skills, but they all three fulfill essential leadership roles in various ways. They all exude the qualities that a coach wants – accountability, work ethic, vocalization, encouragement, and more.”

Gassman and York will help lead the Wildcat attack, along with senior Colin McManigal, who was a second team all-league selection last year with 11 goals. Senior Jordan Brown will come off the bench from the forward spot as well.

Senior Toby Espina-Roca will move from defense to the center midfield position and will provide good experience at a key spot. On the outside, sophomores Emmett White and Colton Blue return after earning varsity minutes last season as freshmen. Seniors Andrew Brown and Brock Varns will also provide minutes on the outside.



Louisburg senior Toby Espina-Roca will move from his old defensive spot, to the midfield this season for the Wildcats.

Sword will lead the Wildcat defense from his center back spot, while senior Ayden Deterding will also provide defensive help in the middle. Seniors Caden French and Owen Barber will serve as the team's outside backs.

Seniors Jackson Olson, Kaven Bartlett, along with sophomores Jacob Brown and Dan Minster, will also see playing time on the defensive side.

A big change for the Wildcats will be in goal, as all-league and all-state goalie Mack Newell joined the football team for his senior season and has been replaced by senior Brecon Klugman.

Bovaird has liked what he has seen so far from his new keeper.

"Brecon has grown so much since joining the program last year – it's incredible," Bovaird said. "He's been working all summer to grow as a goalkeeper. Not only was he at nearly every summer practice, but he would regularly meet up with teammates to have them take shots on him in goal and he would stay after conditioning to get in more reps. He's showing his teammates how committed he is to being our goalie, and he's been very

coachable along the way.”

Helping Bovaird in his first year is former head coach Ben York, who is now serving as the team’s assistant. York was the head coach for 13 years before stepping away in 2015.

This is a group Bovaird is excited to lead in what the Wildcats hope is a special season.

“First of all, their drive and commitment are going to take them far,” Bovaird said. “They were getting together to practice the week after our season ended last year. They’ve been putting as much time in (if not more) on their own as what we’ve had for organized summer practices. These guys are willing to work hard, and they believe in the process, their teammates, and their coaches. We have experience and maturity on our side this year.”

Louisburg will open its season Tuesday when it travels to Pittsburg. Varsity is slated to begin at 6 p.m.