

# Wildcats' trip to Arkansas ends with close loss to 7A Heritage



*Louisburg running back Riley Van Eaton runs for some extra yards despite having his helmet ripped off Friday at Heritage High School in Rogers, Ark. The Wildcats fell to the War Eagles, 20-16.*

ROGERS, Ark. – There were a lot of first for the Louisburg football team on Friday.

For one, it was the Wildcats' first game of the season. Second, for the first time in school history, Louisburg made the 3-hour trip to play a school in Arkansas.

It was also the first game for Drew Harding as the Wildcat head football coach.

A lot of unknowns plagued the Wildcats Friday against Heritage High School in Rogers, Ark. Despite all that, the Wildcats found a lot of positives going up against a 7A program in a different state.

Unfortunately, the one thing the Wildcats wanted to leave with, they couldn't.

Louisburg nearly came back to Kansas with its first win of the season, but fell short in a 20-16 loss to the War Eagles.

Two turnovers, penalties and miscues all hampered the

Wildcats' efforts to win their season opener. Still, Louisburg found itself with a chance to win the game late and Harding found a lot of positives.



***Louisburg senior lineman Nathan Vincent puts some pressure on Heritage quarterback Carter Hensley on Friday.***

“We saw a lot of really good things,” Harding said. “I am not discouraged at all after this game about what our potential can be. We had a lot self-inflicted wounds that will get cleaned up. That is a big difference from week one to week two. If we clean those up, it is a different ball game.”

After both teams punted on their opening possessions, the Wildcat defense had Heritage backed up once again with a 1st and 20. Instead, the War Eagles connected on a 33-yard short pass that resulted in a touchdown.

The Wildcats appeared they were going to answer as they took the ball to midfield, but fumbled the ball and stopped one of many drives on the night.

The first score of the season for Louisburg came thanks to

Ashton Moore, but not from his running back spot. Moore, a linebacker, tracked down a War Eagle running back for a safety late in the first quarter to cut the Heritage lead to 7-2.

Louisburg then answered on its next drive as senior Riley Van Eaton and Moore broke off big runs that set up a 4-yard score by Van Eaton. The Wildcats went for two points, and a Declan Battle tipped pass found the hands of a diving Isaiah Whitley to give them a 10-7 lead.



***Isaiah Whitley dives to make a catch on a 2-point conversion, while Mack Newell signals for the score in the first half of Friday's contest at Heritage.***

Heritage followed that up with a drive of its own that resulted in a 1-yard touchdown by quarterback Carter Hensley. Louisburg senior Jase Hovey blocked the extra point to keep it at a 3-point game.

Right before halftime, the Wildcats drove the ball down the field and was highlighted by a long run by Moore that set up a 25-yard field goal by Layne Ryals to tie it at 13-all.

It was a defensive battle in the second half as both teams had trouble finding the end zone.

Ryals gave Louisburg the lead for the second time as he converted a 32-yard field goal to put the Wildcats up 16-13 in the third quarter.

Van Eaton and Moore provided a bulk of the offense for the Wildcats as the two combined for 160 yards on the ground. Van Eaton carried the ball 15 time for 109 yards and Moore finished with 51 on just three carries.

Louisburg had to face more obstacles as several players had to leave the game with cramping issues, including Moore and senior tight end Mack Newell.

“Downhill running was our best offense for sure,” Harding said. “We started to get some cramps, and that hurt us as we weren’t able to keep our two-back sets going. We are a better passing team than we showed out there and I think that is going to improve.”

The Wildcats tried extend their lead in the fourth quarter. They drove the ball down the field, including a conversion on fourth down, but a bad snap on the Heritage 30-yard line put the Wildcats out of field goal range at the 45, for a 15-yard loss on a third down with under nine minutes left.

“We were driving and doing well,” Harding said. “We had a third and 8 and had a play called that would get us five yards or so and we were planning on going for it on fourth and short. We didn’t take care of what we needed to and that swung the momentum a little bit.”



***Louisburg senior Layne Ryals brings down a War Eagle running back.***

Up until that point, the Wildcat defense had only given up one first down in the second half. However, the War Eagles opened their next drive with a 35-yard pass and ended with a 9-yard touchdown pass from Hensley on third and goal with six minutes left.

The Wildcats had time for a game-winning drive, but Heritage intercepted a Battle pass and the Wildcats didn't get another chance.

Defensively, the Wildcats held firm against Heritage, but gave up 253 yards through the air, including several big plays that led to scores for the War Eagles.

"At times we struggled to defend the pass a little bit," Harding said. "You have to give some credit to them as well. They have a good quarterback and some good receivers that can get open. They are a quality team. But we had some misalignment stuff and some of those first game mistakes."

Against the run, the Wildcats gave up just 56 yards on the ground. On special teams, Lucas Swartz forced a fumble on a mishandled Heritage punt in the second half and Ryals recovered.

Even with the cramping in the second half, Moore led the Wildcats with 13 tackles, including three for a loss. Junior Wyatt Holland and Hovey also finished in double figures with 12 stops each.

Although the Wildcats had a long trip back home, there is a lot of optimism for what lies ahead for the season.

“Obviously we would have liked to win, but I don’t regret the experience at all,” Harding said. “They have a beautiful facility that we were able to come play at and it was a cool experience for the kids. We wanted to finish a little better in the game, but if we correct the things we need to, then I think this will be a positive for us in the long run.”

Louisburg will try for its first win on the season Friday when the Wildcats travel to rival Paola. Kickoff is set for 7 p.m.

## **SCORING SUMMARY**

**HER 7 6 0 7 – 20**

**LOU 2 11 3 0 – 16**

### **First quarter**

H: Tillman McNair 33 pass from Carter Hensley (kick good)

L: Ashton Moore safety

### **Second quarter**

L: Riley Van Eaton 4 run (Declan Battle pass to Isaiah Whitley)

H: Hensley 1 run (kick blocked)

L: Layne Ryals 25 FG

### **Third quarter**

L: Ryals 32 FG

### **Fourth quarter**

H: McNair 9 pass from Hensely (kick good)

### **STATISTICS**

RUSHING – Riley Van Eaton 15-109; Ashton Moore 3-51; Declan Battle 9-33; Wyatt Holland 1-0

PASSING – Declan Battle 8-21-41

RECEIVING – Mason Dobbins 3-29; Riley Van Eaton 3-7; Caden Caplinger 2-5

TACKLES – Ashton Moore 13, Wyatt Holland 12, Jase Hovey 12, Layne Ryals 9, Nathan Vincent 7, Carson Wade 6, Declan Battle 4, Will Hutsell 4, J.R. Rooney 4, Mack Newell 2, Conlee Hovey 1, Isaiah Whitley 1, Brayden Yoder 1