

Wildcats advance to regional title game with win over Maranatha



Louisburg's Colton Blue (right) and Colin McManigal celebrate a goal Tuesday in the Wildcats' 5-2 victory over Maranatha Academy in the Class 4-1A regional semifinal in Louisburg.

The Louisburg boys soccer team did exactly what it wanted to begin the playoffs – continue its hot streak from the regular season.

After getting two wins to end the regular season, the Wildcats put together another positive result – this time in the Class 4-1A regional semifinals. Louisburg hosted Maranatha Academy and came away with a 5-2 victory.

The Wildcats scored four second half goals, despite a muddy and sloppy playing surface, and they are moving onto the regional championship match tonight at Bishop Ward.

“We had a great game overall, despite the conditions,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “These days, so many club teams and high school teams have the luxury of playing on nice turf surfaces, but when it comes down to it, soccer is a sport played on the grass. We have a grass practice field and a grass game field. That’s our home stadium, and we’re very proud of it.”

“Statistically, Tuesday’s game was most likely going to be the

final home game for our seniors, and I wanted them to be able to play one more game on that field. Playing there, especially when it's wet and muddy, creates adversity, but we've shown time and again that it's an advantage for us. On top of all that, the fact that we were able to step up to adversity and unfavorable conditions like the wet field shows that we're capable of handling any adversity thrown at us. You need that preparation for the postseason."



Sophomore Emmett White puts a shot on goal Tuesday against Maranatha.

It didn't take long for the Wildcats to get on the board and they were able to play from in front early.

Senior Gavin York sent a shot into the box and it ricocheted off the Maranatha keeper. The ball bounced to senior Colin McManigal, who put it away in the empty net to give Louisburg a 1-0 advantage three minutes into the contest.

Louisburg (9-6-2) had several good looks at the goal in the first half, but couldn't get it to go in, but still led at halftime.

For the game, the Wildcats outshot Maranatha 42-8 and had 14 corner kicks on the night. Louisburg also had 17 shots on target.

Those opportunities started to go in after halftime. Senior Toby Espina-Roca took a shot near the 18 that flew past the Maranatha keeper, and then sophomore Colton Blue scored to give the Wildcats a 3-0 advantage early in the second half.

Senior Jordan Brown gave the Wildcats their fourth score on a shot near the goal, then after two Maranatha goals, the Wildcats sealed the win with their final tally.



Louisburg senior Cade Gassman wins a ball in the air Tuesday against Maranatha.

Senior Matthew Sword crossed the ball into the box and it found the foot of senior Dagon Klugman, who scored his first varsity goal, and the celebration was on.

"I love how we got organized from the very beginning of the game and were looking to put the ball in the back of the net," Bovaird said. "Getting that first goal so early changed the tone of the game. In the second half, they really stepped things up, and I'm very proud of them for that. One thing I told the guys after the game is that this home field now has special meaning for our seniors. Anyone who was able to score a goal in that game, or any other game, will remember the feeling of seeing the ball hit the net, they'll remember where they were when they scored that goal, and they'll remember what they did to make it happen. That's the incredible thing about this game."

Senior Cade Gassman led the Wildcats in the midfield and was aggressive from the beginning. Gassman led the Wildcats with 10 shots on the night, including five on target.

McManigal had eight shots, with four on target, while Blue finished with five shots and sophomore Emmett White had four. Espina-Roca and York each had three shots.



Wildcat senior Andrew Brown beats a Maranatha player to the

ball Tuesday in Louisburg.

Now the Wildcats are preparing for the Class 4-1A regional championship game tonight at Bishop Ward. Louisburg is hoping to return to the state quarterfinals after falling to Bishop Miege in the same game a year ago.

They will do so without a pair of starters as Sword and Jackson Olson will be gone as they are competing at FFA Nationals. Still, the Wildcats will rally together as they try to keep their season alive.

"We'll be facing adversity again in several ways," Bovaird said. "First, it's an away game on a field that historically has had very poor conditions, but we've shown that we can accommodate that. Second, we'll be without two starters, but we have considerable experience with our senior players and they've shown that they can adapt and overcome.

"Finally, it will be against a fast team with a higher seed, but we've stepped on the field with teams like Spring Hill and Piper and shown the Kansas soccer scene that we can not only compete with them, but also win against them. It'll be a tough game, but we're ready for the challenge."