

Wildcats score five second half goals in shutout of Leavenworth



Louisburg senior Toby Espina-Roca celebrates after scoring one of the Wildcats' five second half goals Thursday in Leavenworth. The Wildcats defeated the Pioneers, 5-0.

LEAVENWORTH – The Louisburg boys soccer team closed out the regular season in style as the Wildcats played some of their best soccer of the season at the right time.

Louisburg scored five second half goals and rolled to a 5-0 victory over Leavenworth. The Wildcats recorded back-to-back shutouts to conclude their schedule.

“That’s the thing about our win against Leavenworth – it was a huge confidence booster for a lot of reasons,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “It’s so important to finish on a positive, and ending our regular season with a win is a powerful boost for the guys’ morale.”

After what was a scoreless first half, the match turned into blowout in about 20 minutes time and the Wildcats had some fun doing it.

Senior Colin McManigal scored two of the five Wildcat goals in the second half and put the first one away two minutes after halftime. McManigal dribbled through defense, worked his way to the middle of the box and shot it past the goalie to give

the Wildcats the lead.



Louisburg senior Colin McManigal celebrates one of his two goals Thursday at Leavenworth.

About 15 minutes later, the Wildcats (8-6-2) struck again. Senior Toby Espina-Roca received a nice give-and-go pass from senior Cade Gassman. Espina-Roca dribbled into the box and put it past the Leavenworth goalie to put the Wildcats up two.

McManigal struck again in the 68th minute as he got a pass from Jackson Olson and then dribbled in near the goal to put another shot away.

“It’s a lot of fun to watch Colin play up top like that,” Bovaird said. “He gets the ball at his feet and finds a way to keep possession and move it through sometimes two or three defenders. He just keeps his feet moving and uses a low center of gravity to power through the defense. He’s got this non-stop work ethic, and this year he’s been a dominant presence on the field.”

The scoring didn’t stop there as a pair of Wildcat seniors got

their first varsity goals just moments later.



Louisburg senior Jordan Brown is surrounded by his teammates following his first varsity goal Thursday at Leavenworth.

Senior forward Jordan Brown went down the middle of the field on a breakaway, his shot bounced off the arm of Leavenworth defender and found the back of the net.

Louisburg did some more celebrating three minutes later. Senior Gavin York sent a free kick into the box and Caden French headed it in for his first varsity goal, which sealed the game for Louisburg.

Those two goals brought the Wildcat bench to their feet as they clinched their second straight win.

“That’s one of the best parts of being a coach – seeing the joy on a kid’s face when he scores his first goal,” Bovaird said. “I feel really fortunate to have been able to witness two guys experience that on Thursday evening. Soccer is one of those sports where sometimes players tend to measure their skill by how many goals they score or how many assists they have, but the truth of the matter is that players have an impact by making things happen on the field. Their movement,

their positioning, their passes – they all add up in the bigger picture.

“Caden and Jordan are examples of how kids can contribute to the team, and I was so happy to see them be able to score a goal. It was icing on the cake.”



Louisburg senior Caden French (left) celebrates with his teammates after he scored his first varsity goal Thursday.

Gassman had a big day for Louisburg in the middle of the field as he finished with a pair of assists, while York and Olson also had an assist.

The Louisburg defense of York, Matthew Sword, Ayden Deterding, Owen Barber, French, Kaven Bartlett and Olson also had a big game, limiting Leavenworth to just six shots.

Senior goalie Brecon Klugman also had his second straight clean sheet with two saves and a blocked shot.

Now the Wildcats' focus shifts to the postseason. Louisburg is the No. 6 seed in this year's Class 4-1A regional tournament and the Wildcats will host Maranatha Academy at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Should the Wildcats advance, they will play either Bishop Ward or Ottawa on Thursday for the regional championship.

“The postseason is always an exciting time, and I can’t wait to see how our guys respond to the opportunity to be out there in the regional tournament,” Bovaird said. “I think there’s a lot of positive energy with the guys, and that energy is infectious. They’re playing really well, and this is the right time to start peaking.

“I told the guys how much fun this season has been. They’ve already made it such a memorable season, so I want them to be able to see it out the way they always dreamed it would be. I love their focus and competitiveness, and I think it’s going to be an exciting run to the end.”