

# Wildcats open state playoffs with shutout of Bonner Springs



*Louisburg senior Nathan Apple (left) celebrates his first varsity touchdown with teammate Layne Ryals late in Friday's shutout of Bonner Springs.*

The last time Louisburg and Bonner Springs squared off in September, the Wildcats found themselves down by a point at halftime before reeling off more than 40 points in the second half to get the win.

This time around, Louisburg left no doubt who was going to win the game.

Louisburg scored seven touchdowns and held Bonner Springs scoreless in a 48-0 win Friday in the first round of the Class 4A state playoffs at Wildcat Stadium.

"We talked all week that it was a 7-6 game at halftime last time we played them and they were ahead," Louisburg coach Drew Harding said. "We had to start out fast and play like the second half of the first meeting we had. Right off the bat we started with a good kick return to give us good field position and we never looked back from there."

Everyone contributed for the Wildcats (8-1) as they reeled off their eighth consecutive victory. Six different players scored touchdowns and quarterback Declan Battle distributed the ball

well.

Battle had three touchdown passes on the night and all three to different receivers. The Louisburg junior finished with 132 yards through the air as the Wildcats jumped out to a 35-0 lead at halftime.



***Louisburg senior Riley Van Eaton sheds a Bonner Springs defender Friday at Wildcat Stadium. Van Eaton rushed for more than 100 yards and two touchdowns.***

"This is the first game where I think we really spread the ball around," Harding said. "We had catches by five or six different receivers and our backs were getting good carries."

On the game's opening kickoff, the Wildcats put themselves in good position. Junior Hunter Heinrich returned the kick 59 yards, and the Wildcats found the end zone on a 4-yard run by senior Riley Van Eaton.

It was the first of two touchdowns for Van Eaton, who finished the game with 116 yards on the ground on just 17 carries.

After the Wildcats forced a Bonner three-and-out, a shanked

Braves punt gave Louisburg the ball on the Bonner Springs 34-yard line. A 24-yard pass to Mack Newell from Battle set the Wildcats up inside the 5, and there Battle hit senior Corbin Hamman for a 3-yard touchdown pass.

On the Wildcats' next possession, Battle found junior Caden Caplinger on a 22-yard touchdown pass as Louisburg took a three score lead into the second quarter.



***Louisburg senior Mason Dobbins hauls in a long touchdown pass in the second quarter of Friday's playoff game against Bonner Springs.***

Louisburg's passing game continued to thrive as Battle hit senior Mason Dobbins for 57-yard touchdown pass, then sophomore Ashton Moore had a 14-yard touchdown run before halftime to give the Wildcats a 35-0 lead.

Van Eaton scored a touchdown on a 2-yard run in the third quarter, and then with a running clock, the Wildcat reserves had a chance to score in the fourth.

It turned out to be a special moment, as with under a minute



left in the game, backup quarterback Alex Saad hit senior Nathan Apple for a 24-yard score as it was Apple's first varsity touchdown.

"That was the highlight of the night for me," Harding said. "There are not enough good things you can say about Nathan Apple and the kind of kid that he is. He works so hard every single day. He was supposed to go to Scholar's Bowl on Thursday, but he stayed back so he could stay on special teams and be with his teammates. For him to get a touchdown was awesome."

Defensively, the Wildcats shined as well. Louisburg held Bonner Springs to just 133 yards of total offense and forced a turnover.

Moore led the Wildcats with nine tackles on the night, while senior Nathan Vincent finished with seven, including three tackles for a loss and a sack.



***Louisburg senior Isaiah Whitley chases down the Bonner Springs quarterback Friday in the team's 48-0 win.***

Senior Isaiah Whitley also recorded a sack, while Heinrich led the team with three pass deflections. J.R. Rooney, Caplinger and Whitley each had a forced fumble, while Will Hutsell had a fumble recovery.

“Defensively, different people were making plays and we got a shutout, so that is always good,” Harding said. “It was a lot of fun to see their success.”

Christian Golladay, Hutsell, Rooney, Jaymes Melton, Vincent and Brayton Brueggen all played on the offensive line and controlled the line of scrimmage. Defensively, Rooney, Hutsell, Newell, Whitley and Vincent did the same.

“The big boys up front played well,” Hardin said. “We had a couple new guys step and start as we had some guys gone for FFA and missed practice. They new guys like Christian Golladay were able to get in there and then the starters were able to get back in after a bit. We had some good depth and they all played well.”

The Wildcats have a big test ahead of them in the regional round of the playoffs as they will host St. Thomas Aquinas. The game has been moved up to Thursday from Friday due to inclement weather in the forecast. Kickoff is still set for 7 p.m.

Harding knows it will be a challenge for his group as Aquinas is ranked No. 1 in Class 4A by the Kansas Football Coaches Association, but his players are prepared and excited to get back on the field.

“They are a good team,” Harding said of Aquinas. “I think they are ranked No. 1 in the state, but if we have learned anything about the kids that we have is that they battle no matter the circumstances. We will have a game plan ready, get prepared and come out and compete.”

# SCORING SUMMARY

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## **First quarter**

L: Riley Van Eaton 4 run (Layne Ryals kick)

L: Corbin Hamman 3 pass from Declan Battle (Ryals kick)

L: Caden Caplinger 22 pass from Battle (Ryals kick)

## **Second quarter**

L: Mason Dobbins 57 pass from Battle (Ryals kick)

L: Ashton Moore 14 run (Ryals kick)

## **Third quarter**

L: Van Eaton 2 run (Ryals kick)

## **Fourth quarter**

L: Nathan Apple 24 pass from Alex Saad (run failed)

# STATISTICS

**RUSHING** – Riley Van Eaton 17-116; Declan Battle 5-43; Ashton Moore 3-24; Wyatt Holland 2-23; Logan Henry 3-13; Russell Wiseman 2-10

**PASSING** – Declan Battle 7-9-132; Alex Saad 3-4-43

**RECEIVING** – Mason Dobbins 2-67; Mack Newell 1-24; Nathan Apple 1-24; Caden Caplinger 1-22; Myles Vohs 2-19; Riley Van Eaton 2-16; Corbin Hamman 1-3

**TACKLES** – Ashton Moore 9, Nathan Vincent 7, Wyatt Holland 6,

Caden Caplinger 4, Isaiah Whitley 3, Will Hutsell 3, J.R. Rooney 3, Mason Dobbins 2, Corbin Hamman 2, Mack Newell 2, Jackson Kush 2, Layne Ryals 2, Brayden Yoder 2, Declan Battle 1, Reid McCaskill 1, Brady Hickey 1, Carson Wade 1, Brayton Brueggen 1