

Wildcats' season comes to a close with loss to Aquinas



Louisburg seniors Jase Hovey (left) and Layne Ryals team up to bring down a St. Thomas Aquinas player Thursday during the Class 4A regional playoffs at Wildcat Stadium.

All seasons come to an end at one point or another, but for the Louisburg football team, the Wildcats weren't ready to be done.

That made it all the more difficult as they suffered a 40-0 loss to St. Thomas Aquinas on Thursday in the regional round of the Class 4A playoffs. The Wildcats watched as Aquinas celebrated on their own field – a celebration they were hoping to do themselves.

The Wildcats did their best to keep the Saints down, but just couldn't keep up with Aquinas – who moved down from Class 5A a year ago.

Still, Louisburg put together a season to remember as it reeled off eight wins in a row and earned its first Frontier League championship since 2018.

“It is a tough one, obviously, but I think in the next few days that people are going to be proud of the season we put together,” Louisburg coach Drew Harding said. “To be league champions, when nobody picked us or expected us to do it, I think the kids put together a phenomenal season and it is something to be proud of.”

Kansas Class 4A football has emerged as one of the toughest classification to win a state championship.

A class that already features perennial power Bishop Miege and St. James Academy (who won the state title the last two years), added another this season with the inclusion of St. Thomas Aquinas.

All three play in the challenging Eastern Kansas League against all the Blue Valley programs – which mainly consist of Class 6A schools.

Each of the private schools were in Louisburg's part of the bracket and the Wildcats were going to have a difficult road. Unfortunately for Louisburg, the Wildcats could not get past Aquinas – the best team Louisburg has seen this season.



Louisburg head coach Drew Harding talks to his team following the Wildcats' loss Thursday to Aquinas.

"They are a really good team," Harding said. "They have a physical line up front and have some big backs that can run downhill well. They have an effective passing game too.

"They are a really good offensive team, but they are really

good defensively as well. Their front is great, linebackers are fast and physical and they have the best group of defensive backs that we have seen all year. All across the board, they are a good team and well coached.”

It wasn't a high-scoring game in the first half as the Wildcat defense did their best to slow the Saints down. After Aquinas scored on their opening drive, the Wildcats had a chance to answer.

Louisburg put together a drive that lasted more than six minutes that included by runs by Riley Van Eaton and quarterback Declan Battle that took the ball to midfield.

Battle then tried to hit Mason Dobbins down the sideline for a pass, but Aquinas was called for pass interference to put the ball in Saints territory. Van Eaton then picked up a first down for Louisburg on a 14-yard run.

Aquinas sacked Battle on a third down at the 30, which set up a Layne Ryals field goal attempt. The 47-yard kick was blocked, but the Wildcats ran more than six minutes off the clock.



Louisburg senior Will Hutsell (61) and sophomore Ashton Moore bring down an Aquinas runner Thursday.

Louisburg's defense came up big and forced a 3-and-out thanks to tackles for a loss by Wyatt Holland and Jase Hovey. The Saints did the same to the Wildcat offense and got the ball back early in the second.

Nathan Vincent and Ashton Moore forced the Saints offense into a 3rd and 14 thanks to tackles for a loss, but quarterback Aiden Skinner completed a 25-yard pass to keep the drive alive. Three plays later, the Saints scored on a 20-yard run.

St. Thomas Aquinas would take advantage of short Wildcat punt on their next possession and Sean Carroll scored on a 2-yard run to go up 21-0 at halftime.

"I really think we had chances to put some points on the board, but when you make mistakes that is going to change the game and change the momentum," Harding said. "We just couldn't make those plays, and when you play a really good team, the mistakes you make get magnified and that is what happened."

Aquinas tacked on three more touchdowns in the second half and the Wildcats didn't get many looks at the end zone in the final two quarters.

Their best look came toward the end of the first half as Battle connected with Hovey and Van Eaton on pass plays. The Wildcats eventually got down to the Saints' 11-yard line, but their drive stalled there.



Louisburg senior Riley Van Eaton avoids an Aquinas defender to gain some extra yards Thursday.

Van Eaton led the Wildcat rushing attack with 97 yards on the ground and also had 42 yards receiving. Battle threw for 87 yards on the night and also had 31 yards on the ground.

Defensively, the Wildcats made some big plays throughout the night. Hovey led the Wildcats with 13 tackles and Moore finished with 10. Louisburg also combined to record seven tackles for a loss.

The loss also marks the end for 16 Louisburg seniors. Mason Dobbins, Corbin Hamman, Isaiah Whitley, Mack Newell, Jackson

Kush. Carson Wade, Jase Hovey, Riley Van Eaton, Nathan Apple, Layne Ryals, Nathan Vincent, Hunter Moore, Will Hutsell, Jackson Rooney, Christian Golladay and Brayton Brueggen all played their final game as a Wildcat.

“We have 16 seniors and top to bottom they all contributed within their respective roles,” Harding said. “It is tough because they have put a lot into the program. While their playing days of Louisburg football might have ended, they will always be Louisburg football players and a part of this program.”

SCORING SUMMARY

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STA 7 14 6 13 – 40

First Quarter

S: Gianni Rizzi 32 run (Matt Seibolt kick)

Second Quarter

S: Sean Carroll 20 run (Seibolt kick)

S: Carroll 2 run (Seibolt kick)

Third Quarter

S: Jeremiah Penney 20 pass from Aiden Skinner (kick failed)

Fourth Quarter

S: Carroll 17 run (kick failed)

S: Brogan Jaworski 35 run (Seibolt kick)

STATISTICS

RUSHING – Riley Van Eaton 22-97; Declan Battle 11-31; Jase Hovey 1-7; Ashton Moore 1-0

PASSING – Declan Battle 8-20-87

RECEIVING – Riley Van Easton 3-42; Mason Dobbins 3-31; Jase Hovey 1-10; Mack Newell 1-4

TACKLES – Jase Hovey 13, Ashton Moore 10, Wyatt Holland 8, Layne Ryals 7, Will Hutsell 5, Caden Caplinger 4, Nathan Vincent 4, Declan Battle 2, Isaiah Whitley 2, J.R. Rooney 2, Mason Dobbins 1, Mack Newell 1, Brady Hickey 1, Carson Wade 1