

Wildcats suffer heartbreak in triple-overtime loss to Bishop Ward



Louisburg head coach Bobby Bovaird consoles Wildcat goalie Brecon Klugman shortly after the Wildcats' 2-1 loss to Bishop Ward on Thursday in the regional championship game at Bishop Ward High School. The Wildcats lost in three overtimes, with the deciding goal coming on a penalty kick late in the third OT.

KANSAS CITY, Kan. – With the right to advance to the state quarterfinals on the line, Louisburg and Bishop Ward did everything possible for their respective teams to keep their season alive.

In the end, two penalty kicks decided the winner of the Class 4-1A regional championship match.

Bishop Ward converted a penalty kick in the first half to take the lead, then after Louisburg tied it in the second half, the match went into extra time.

In the third overtime, Louisburg was called for a foul in the box and the Cyclones were awarded their second penalty kick and converted to hand the Wildcats a 2-1 defeat.

It was a crushing end to the Wildcats' season in what was an evenly played match throughout.

"I don't think I've ever seen so many tears flowing after a game as I did Thursday night," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "The talent of this group, combined with their work ethic, coachability, desire, and unity, was something amazing to be a part of. They definitely played very well toward the end of the season, and they bought into the program this year. They overcame a rough start and started to peak at just the right time to make a run in the postseason. None of them wanted it to end so soon, but they did everything they possibly could to keep it going."



Louisburg senior Cade Gassman tries to settle the ball Thursday at Bishop Ward.

The loss enough was difficult to stomach, but the fact the difference the match was a pair of penalty kicks, made it even tougher on the Wildcat players.

"The frustrating thing about that game was that we played so well considering the circumstances and adversities we faced," Bovaird said. "We controlled possession of the ball for most of the game, and we had them on the ropes many times. I mean, we had 8 corners to their 2, and we had 13 crosses to their 9.

We played tough defense, but it's frustrating that two subjective calls decided the outcome of the game."

Louisburg faced adversity from the start as the Wildcats had to play without two of their starters – Matthew Sword and Jackson Olson – who were out of town competing at FFA nationals and the Wildcats relied on their bench to help pick up the slack.



Senior Gavin York heads the ball out of the back for Louisburg.

The Wildcats did more than that. Seniors Andrew Brown and Brock Varns helped fill the void at Olson's outside-mid spot, while senior Gavin York moved over to Sword's sweeper spot. Another senior, Caden French, filled in as an outside back.

"At the end of the day, a game like Thursday's regional championship is a testament to a team's character," Bovaird said. "The fact that we were missing two starters, one of whom being our defensive leader (Sword), and we were on a field that really didn't seem to fit game standards and we still took it to the wire shows the grit that our guys have.

“They entered that match as the underdogs, but they battled every minute of the game. My hats off to Gavin for transitioning to sweeper and playing a great game, Caden for stepping in and marking some of their fastest players, and Andrew for sliding to the opposite side and giving us some offensive presence. Those three were ready to do their part for the team, and I think they made a phenomenal impact in the absence of Jackson and Matthew.”



Louisburg senior Caden French clears the ball away for the Wildcat defense Thursday against Bishop Ward.

Bishop Ward opened the scoring in the first half as the Wildcats were called for a foul in the box on a breakaway attempt by Ward. The Cyclones converted the penalty kick and took a 1-0 lead at halftime.

It stayed that way till midway through the second half. Louisburg senior Colin McManigal took the corner kick and senior Cade Gassman headed the ball in for the equalizer.

“That was the boost we needed,” Bovaird said. “At that point in the game, we were trailing and the game was three-fourths

of the way finished. In soccer, if you're not scoring goals by that point, things start changing. Players get desperate, they lose focus on the game plan, and they start questioning if they have what it takes to pull out a win. Cade's goal gave our guys the extra wind they needed to push through the end of regular time."

The Wildcats took 17 shots for the match, including seven by Gassman to lead the Louisburg attack. Senior Toby Espina-Roca and sophomore Emmett White had three and two shots, respectively.



Louisburg goalie Brecon Klugman jumps up for a save in the first half of Thursday's regional championship game at Bishop Ward.

Louisburg senior goalie Brecon Klugman made sure it stayed tied throughout the overtime periods. Klugman finished with three saves and five blocked shots.

Klugman really stepped up in the second overtime period with a save and three blocked shots, including one where he used his body to deflect a Cyclone shot on a breakaway attempt.

“What a phenomenal season Brecon’s had,” Bovaird said. “Brecon came out for the first time last year and only played half the time in goal on junior varsity, and the other time he spent on the field in defense. This year, he slid right into the starting goalie position, and he made some incredible saves that night. If it hadn’t been for his athleticism and growth over the season, we wouldn’t have been in the position we were in at the end of the season.”

With 27 seconds left in the third overtime, Bishop Ward went on the attack and had several scrums in front of the goal. All that led to a Wildcat foul in the box when a player slid to make a play on the loose ball as the Ward player was going for it.



Louisburg senior Toby Espina-Roca flies through the air to knock the ball away Thursday.

The official awarded the Cyclones the penalty kick and they converted to take the regional championship – and at the same time – 15 Wildcat seniors saw their high school careers come to an end.

Gassman, McManigal, Brecon Klugman, Varns, Andrew Brown, Jordan Brown, Ayden Deterding, French, Owen Barber, York,

Sword, Olson, Dagon Klugman, Espina-Roca and Kaven Bartlett all suited up for Louisburg for the final time.

"My heart is broken for the team, especially the seniors," Bovaird said. "I really don't like speaking negatively of game officials, but I strongly feel that you either need to take control of that style of play early in the game and call it consistently, or you need to allow the players to decide the game and avoid making those powerfully impacting subjective calls."

The Wildcats finished their season with a 9-7-2 record, including wins in three of their last four matches.

"The last few years, we've talked about the program being a family, and every year I see more and more what that means," Bovaird said. "We had the motto 'United' this year, and that's what we were. In the face of adversity, we stepped up and were ready for the challenge. I'm nothing but proud of these guys, and I'm truly going to miss this senior class."