

# Experience, new coach ready to lead Wildcats for 2023 season



*Louisburg junior Lexi Hampton returns as the team leader in goals scored and points from last season. The Wildcats open their season today at home against Lansing.*

There hasn't been the kind of prep that new Louisburg head coach Ben York would have liked going into his first season with the Wildcats girls soccer team.

School activities, spring break and other things have prevented the whole team from practicing together. With that, the Wildcats will open their season today as they host Lansing in their home opener.

Luckily for York, he has an experienced group coming back. Louisburg returns eight of its 11 starters from a year ago that lost in the regional championship game and finished with a 13-5 record.

"We really haven't had a single practice with everyone there with trips, spring break and other things," York said. "We will just see, but I couldn't be more excited. I think the girls are ready to go.

"More than anything, we have a good group of responsible, intelligent and hard-working girls. The rest of it, we just need to figure how to get all that talent to work together on

the field and provide good results.”

York is taking over for Kyle Conley, who coached the Wildcats since the program’s inception. The transition has been an easy one according to York, and the girls have bought in since he started working with them over the summer.

“The biggest thing I am grateful for is since day one, there wasn’t a question of who is this guy and what is he doing,” York said. “I know they were upset when their coach left and he was a very, very large part of the girls program. He created just a wonderful environment for everyone.

“From day one, the girls didn’t question what I asked and that instant respect has been super helpful for me. Some of these girls might have known who I am before this started, but some of them don’t. It takes a little of the pressure off me and the girls have been ready to just move forward.”



***Louisburg senior Adyson Ross is one of eight returning starters from a season ago.***

The Wildcats will move forward with a lot of experience as

they return six all-league players and eight starters in all.

It all starts in the midfield, where the Wildcats bring back a wealth of experience. That experience includes senior Adyson Ross and junior Lola Edwards, who were all-state selections a season ago.

Sophomores Rowan Yows, Jaden Bentz and senior Brylee Diederich also return and played significant minutes for the Wildcats a year ago and will also see time in the midfield.

“I really think the midfield is the strength of our team,” York said. “We have six or seven quality midfielders and then we just need to figure out where we go from there.”



***Junior Lola Edwards is back to lead a talented Wildcat midfield this season.***

Louisburg also brings experience back up top. Junior Lexi Hampton, who returns as the team’s leading scorer from a year ago, will look to once again cause problems for opposing defenses.

Joining Hampton will be senior Bree Gassman, who will move up

from her midfield spot she played a season ago. Sophomore Baileigh Johnson, Yows and Diederich could also see time up top as well. Senior Tehya Harvey would also see time at forward, but is out with an injury she suffered in the fall.

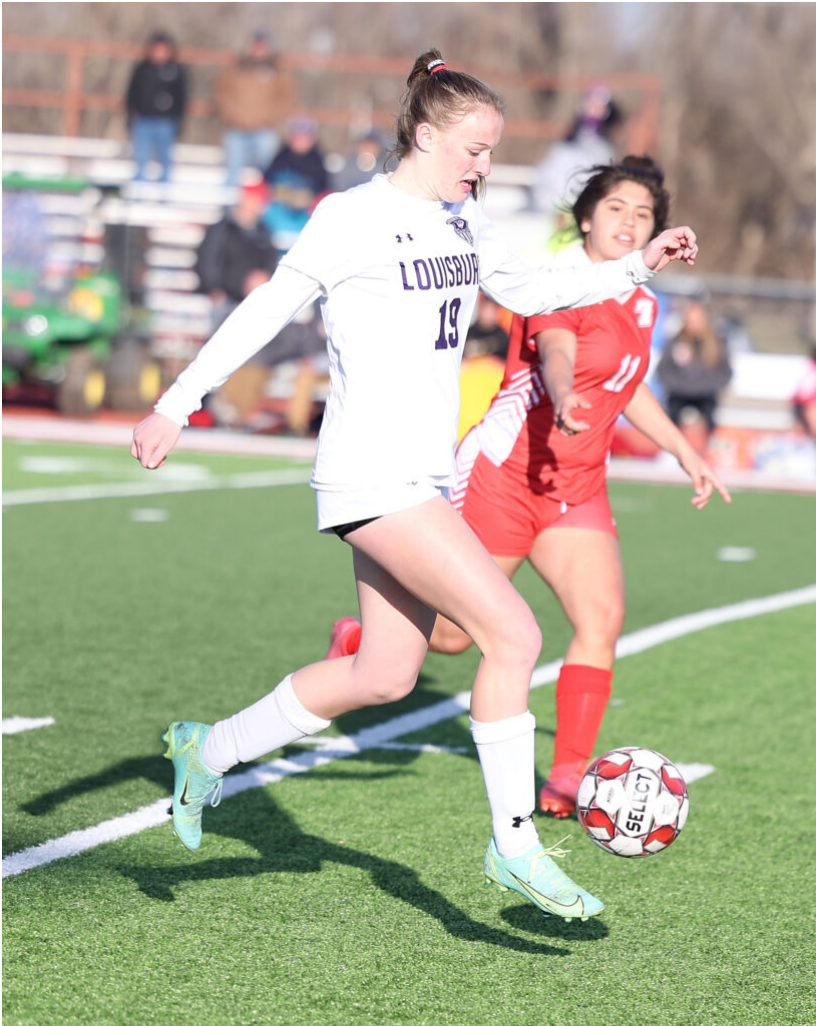
Defensively, the Wildcats will begin the season with four in the back and York will look to junior Hailey Sword to serve as the team's stopper. She will join senior Brianne Kuhlman, junior Bronwynn Williams and junior newcomer Ellery Allen in the back.

Sophomore defender Eryn Richardson, who saw a lot of varsity time as a freshman, is out with an injury to begin the year.

"As far as what I am less sure about is our defense, just because we lost a good senior from last year and Eryn is out with an injury," York said. "That is some big changes back there."

"We are going to pull Hailey back and have her be our stopper and I think that will help solidify us back there, just because we are so strong in the midfield already. She is really good in the air and good with organizing. It may not be her favorite thing to do, but it is best for us. We might play with three in the back, but for now we are going to start with four and see how that goes. It is a little safer way to start with."





***Louisburg junior Hailey Sword will make the move to defense this season and is the team's stopper in the back.***

The Wildcats will also introduce a new goalie as junior Macy Lemke will take on the starting role full time after seeing some playing time on the varsity level a year ago.

"I watched a few games last year and I could tell that Macy was the future in goal and she did a great job," York said. "Macy hasn't missed a beat taking over for Sierra (Hahn), who is off playing college ball right now. She is confident and a good presence on the field. I have all the faith in her and has made some great saves."

Louisburg has a good amount of depth this season, but York isn't quite sure how he is going to use it all yet.

"I don't like to sub a whole lot," York said. "I have 17 girls that can play and probably 14 of them that wouldn't like to

sub off. I like the cohesiveness on the field and letting them play, but I also understand that we are blessed right now to have extra talent. If we can find ways to make that all happen without killing the chemistry, then we will do that.”

The Wildcats begin their season tonight when they host Lansing and will begin their journey to what they hope is a successful season.

“I don’t try to set expectations until I know more about the group,” York said. “We are just going to take (Tuesday) and see what we do. This is all new to me as far as knowing what challenges other teams present. I just want them to do their best every day and will see what happens after that.”