

Wildcat football hoping to run it back for another league title



Louisburg senior quarterback Declan Battle returns for this third year under center after earning all-league and all-state honors last season.

Last season was a memorable one for the Louisburg football team.

The Wildcats ran through Frontier League with an undefeated record and finished with their first league title since 2018. Although it ended with a loss to St. Thomas Aquinas in the playoffs, it was a successful run.

Louisburg hopes to have that same type of success, if not more, this season but the Wildcats will have a little different look to them. They said goodbye to a 16-member senior class, including several all-league and all-state players.

Still, that success and confidence has bled over into the 2023 season and the Wildcats are hoping it can continue what it started a year ago.

“I think it gave us some confidence and also helped establish the standard for where we want to be,” Louisburg coach Drew Harding said of last year’s finish. “The Frontier League is tough, so in order to compete for the league title you have to

be ready week in and week out.

“Honestly, without having played anyone else I’m not sure if we have an identity just yet. We were hoping to get an idea with the jamboree, but with the heat we obviously had to change course. I think we will find ourselves over the first few weeks of the season.”

Even though the roster will look a little different in 2023, there are still plenty of familiar faces on the Wildcat sideline and it starts under center.

Senior Declan Battle returns for his third season as the starting varsity quarterback and is coming off an impressive junior campaign. He finished with more than 1,700 yards of total offense and had 18 touchdowns.

That all led to a first-team all-league selection and was also named honorable mention all-state.

“Declan had a really good year for us last year,” Harding said. “I was very proud of the way he picked up a new offense and really played well in the run game and passing game for us. We are hoping he continues to develop, feels more confident in our system, and puts together another really good season for us.”

Battle also has a lot of his offensive weapons back from a season ago in junior tailback Ashton Moore and senior running back Wyatt Holland. He also returns a pair of all-league players at receiver in seniors Caden Caplinger and Hunter Heinrich, while junior Darby Van Eaton will see time at running back.



Louisburg junior Ashton Moore returns after leading the team in tackles last season and earned first team all-league and all-state honors.

Seniors Brody McGreer, Blake Amren, along with juniors Myles Vohs, Reid McCaskill and Josh Holtzen, could all see time at wide receiver throughout the year.

A big difference this season for the Wildcats will be on the line of scrimmage where they have to replace four of the five starting linemen from last year. Senior center Jaymes Melton is back to lead the group.

Seniors Jackson Howard, Ben O'Bryan, along with juniors Brayden Yoder, Miles Meek, Nate Capuro and sophomore Johnny Hendrickson could all see time on the offensive line.

Louisburg will also feature new players at the tight end position in senior Brock Vohs and junior Conlee Hovey.

“You know I think we have the bodies to help replace those guys up front from last year but we will find out for sure here in the first few weeks,” Harding said. “There is still some competition that is taking place along the lines and we will probably be playing several guys as we start the season at some spots.”

The defensive line will also feature a lot of new faces in Vohs, Hovey, Howard, Yoder, O’Bryan, Hendrickson, Meek and senior Drake Crooks.

However, the defensive leadership for Louisburg will come at the linebacker position. Moore and Holland will help anchor the defense after a strong 2022 season.

Moore, who was a first team all-state and all-league selection as a sophomore, returns for his junior season after leading the Wildcats in tackles last season with 114, including 12 for a loss.

Holland tallied 89 tackles last season, which earned him second team all-league honors and Harding likes what he has in his veteran linebackers.



Senior Wyatt Holland returns as a starting linebacker and was named a second team all-league player last season.

“Ashton and Wyatt I believe were both in the top three of our team in terms of tackles, so that kind of experience is nice to have back,” Harding said. “The nice thing about those guys is they can both really run. They can both make plays sideline to sideline. Last year was Wyatt’s first year ever playing linebacker and it was Ashton’s first year playing linebacker on the varsity level, so they both should feel much more confident this year. We need them to step up vocally on the defense and get everyone lined up and so far they have been doing a good job.”

In the secondary, the Wildcats return just two starters in Caplinger (safety) and Heinrich (cornerback). Battle, Caplinger, senior Brady Hickey and junior Lucas Swartz are all competing for a starting safety spot, while Heinrich, McGreer,

Vohs, McCaskill and junior Alex Saad will be the team's cornerbacks.

It will be a different type of season for the Wildcats, but the goals are still the same and that is to finish atop the league standings.

"Our expectations are that we will need to get better every week," Harding said. "We have a lot of new players along both sides of the line of scrimmage, so we hope to see big strides for both of those groups throughout the season. We want to put ourselves in a position to compete for another Frontier League title, and in order to do that we have to improve and play well each and every week."

That starts today as the Wildcats host Heritage High School from Rogers, Ark. The War Eagles are making the return trip this season after the Wildcats suffered a close loss at their place a season ago.

However, with a new season comes a clean slate and the players are excited to get the season going.

"Practices have been going well," Harding said. "The guys are extremely excited to get the season going and there was a boost in energy once we started a game week. I think everyone is ready to go against somebody other than ourselves."