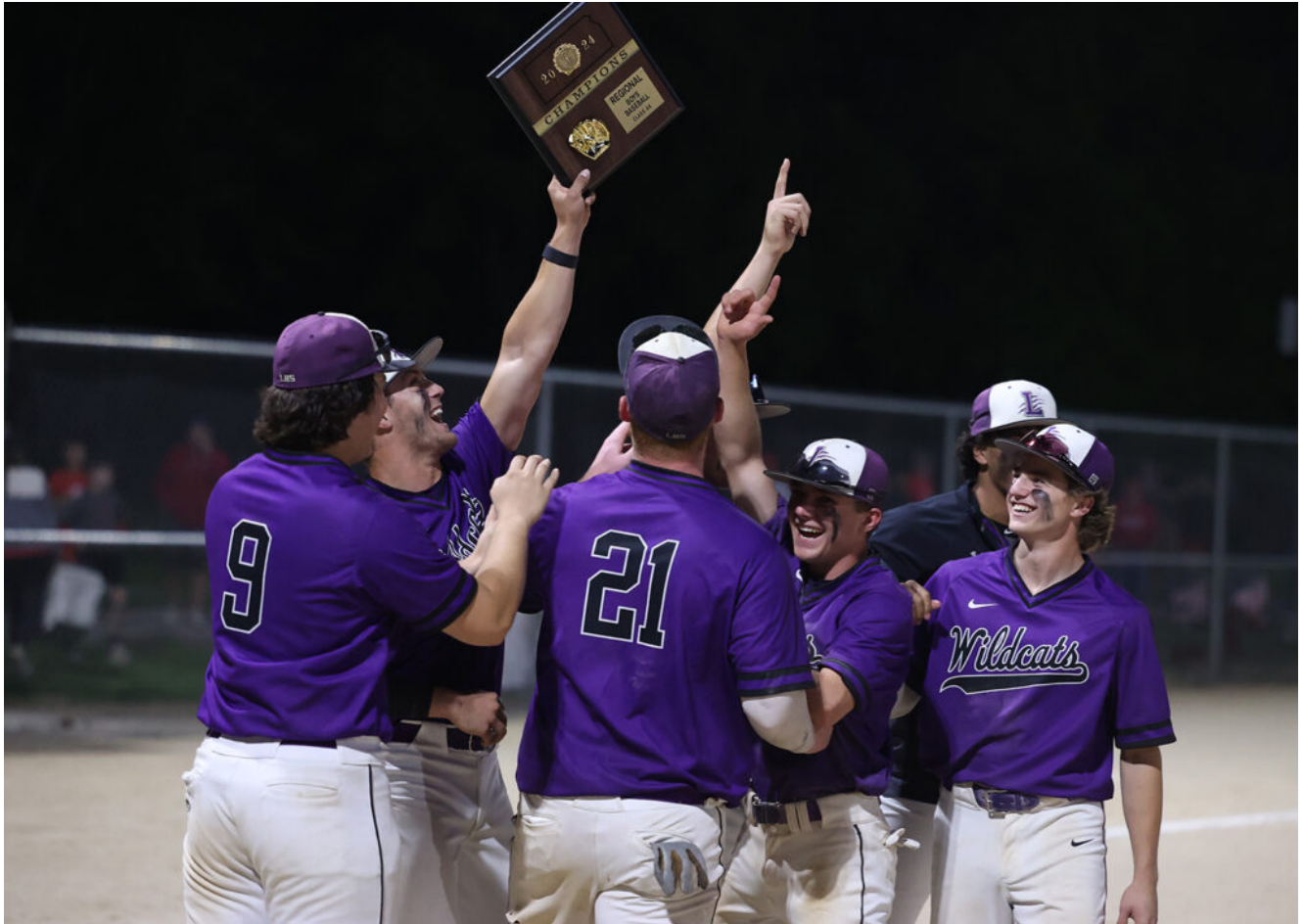


STATE BOUND: Wildcats win regional title for first time in 15 years



Louisburg senior Declan Battle hoists the regional championship trophy last Tuesday following the Wildcats' 10-3 win over Wamego in Class 4A regional championship game.

The current members of the Louisburg baseball team couldn't remember the last time the Wildcats made the state tournament even if they tried.

That's because they were just wee toddlers the last time the Wildcats earned a spot a state – 2009 to be exact.

These players are going to have a hard time forgetting this one.

For the first time in 15 years, Louisburg is headed back to

the state tournament after the Wildcats put together a convincing 10-3 victory over Wamego in the Class 4A regional championship last Tuesday at Lewis-Young Park.

The Wildcats also defeated Parsons, 8-0, in the regional semifinal to put together what was a dominating performance from top to bottom.

"This is just amazing," Louisburg coach Kade Larson said. "To see how much work these guys have put in, then to come out and get the job done, it is pretty surreal. We had a bunch of guys step up and do exactly what they needed to do. They played great defense, pitched great and everyone in the dug out was into the game. It was a great win.

"It has been awhile and it has been a long time coming. We have had some great teams and this team finally pushed through and got it done."

Although the Wildcats pounded out 18 runs in the two games, it all started on the mound.

Junior Alex Saad got the start for the Wildcats against Parsons and gave his team the performance they needed to advance. Saad pitched a complete game shutout, gave up two hits and struck out eight.



Louisburg junior Alex Saad pitched a complete game shutout in the Class 4A regional semis against Parsons.

"I think I threw pretty good," Saad said. "My last couple of outings have been kinda rough and I haven't been throwing enough strikes. My goal was to just throw some strikes and let my defense work behind me and we got some good results. Won the first game and it couldn't be better."

Another junior, Meade Rutherford, got the start in the championship game against Wamego and gave the Wildcats the performance they were hoping for. Rutherford pitched 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings, gave up one earned run, allowed five hits and struck out five.

"I threw very relaxed," Rutherford said. "I wanted to go deep into the game, and I knew that if I just threw strikes that my defense would have my back. My 2-seamer worked really well, and although my velocity wasn't where I wanted it, I thought I had good movement and it was working. (Catcher) Danny (Napier)

and I were on the same page and he did a great job behind the plate. Even if I gave up a couple runs, I knew our hitters were going to get some runs for me.

“I wasn’t nervous at all. Based on the energy we had from our last game, I knew if we played our game that we had it. I knew that if I come and do my job, the offense would do their job and they did.”

Although it took a couple innings to get going, the Wildcat bats heated up against Wamego at the perfect time.

Wamego took a 1-0 lead into the bottom of the third inning, before the Louisburg bats broke through with three runs in the third and then six more in the fourth inning to all but put the game away.



Louisburg junior Luke Schultz slides safely into home last Tuesday against Parsons.

Junior Luke Schultz and senior Jackson Howard each had two

hits and 2 RBIs to lead the way for Louisburg, while Declan Battle and Danny Napier each had RBI hits as well.

Taking a 3-1 lead into the fourth inning, Battle brought his teammates together in the dugout pleading for more runs and they answered the call.

“Wamego had a ton of energy and then they scored first and we didn’t have the energy they did for those first couple of innings,” Battle said. “Then we were able to score three and that definitely set the tone I think. I brought the guys together in the dugout the next inning and told them we need to score more and we just put it on them. Then all of a sudden we got 10 runs and we are going to state. It is pretty cool.

Sophomore Bristol Barbour opened the fourth inning with a single and a stolen base, but then faced with two outs, the Wildcats came through in a big way.

Battle got it started with an RBI single and stole second. He later scored on a Schultz single, who would score on a double from Napier. Howard added a single and pinch-runner Rylan Carty scored on a Wamego error.



Louisburg sophomore Danny Napier celebrates his RBI double against Wamego.

The Wildcats ended the inning with a bang as senior Jack Anderson hit a 2-run home run that inched over the right field fence to give Louisburg a 9-1 lead.

"I honestly didn't think it was going out," Anderson said. "I thought it was going to get caught, but I guess I back spun it enough for it to carry a little further. I will take it for sure. It was very exciting. To see everyone hyped for me at home plate, it was just a great feeling."

After Rutherford exited with two outs in the sixth, Battle came in for relief and got a strikeout for the final out. He got two quick outs in the seventh, before running into a little trouble, but got the strikeout for the final out of the game and the celebration ensued.

"It was great to be able to come in with two outs and strike that first batter out," Battle said. "Then I got two outs

easy, but then I kind of lost it a little bit. It definitely felt good to be able to finish the game with Danny and striking that last guy out. It just felt great.”

It took a little while for the Wildcat bats to get going against Parsons, but they eventually whittled away at the Vikings with two runs in the third and fourth innings, three in the fifth and another in the sixth to all but seal the win.

Barbour had a big day at the plate with two doubles and an RBI, while Battle finished with an RBI triple. Senior Brody McGreer contributed an RBI double, while senior Nathaniel Lamm and Howard also had RBI base hits. Rutherford also had a double and a run scored.



Louisburg head coach Kade Larson gets nice ice bath from Luke Schultz following the Wildcats’ regional title.

After capturing a Frontier League title and a regional championship, the Wildcats have their eyes set on a state title.

Louisburg (19-6) earned the No. 4 seed at the state tournament and will meet a familiar foe in Paola as the Panthers are the No. 5 seed. The game will take place at 1:15 p.m. on Thursday at Dean Evans Stadium in Salina.

The winner will advance to play two more games on Friday.

"Everything stays the same," Larson said. "You throw strikes, play great defense, have great team at-bats. Ever since we lost to Basehor to end the year, we just told the guys you go win a game, then you get another. That is our motto going into state and we will see what happens."

Win or lose, it will be a memorable experience for the entire Wildcat team and they are looking forward to the challenge.



Louisburg will play Paola at 1:15 p.m. on Thursday in a Salina in the first round of the Class 4A state tournament.

"I have played baseball for as long as I can remember," Anderson said. "Growing up, you have tournaments and stuff, and you would win them every now and then, but they don't

really mean a whole lot. But being with the team that we have now, being able to put our year up on the wall where it says 'Regional Champions,' is a very good feeling. I really think we can go all the way and I know that we can do it.

"Every team (at state) is there for a reason. I believe if we play our best that we can beat anyone in the state, but that is what we are going to have to do – play our best."