Wildcats outlast Independence in home opener to win second straight



Louisburg's Mika McKitrick (24) and Owen Marsh (9) celebrate with Colton Blue following his goal right before halftime Thursday against Independence.

It may just be two games into the season, but this is exactly the start the Louisburg boys soccer team was hoping to see.

On Thursday in its home opener, Louisburg held off Independence for a 2-1 victory, which was its second straight win to start the season. The Wildcats, who won just four matches a year ago, are primed for a big rebound.

“The guys are feeling pretty good, coming off our opening week with two hard-fought wins,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “In both games, we were ahead of our opponents in nearly every category – we outscored them, out-possessed them, out-shot them and out-passed them. Last year, and the year before, we had several games where we did some of those things but still couldn’t pull out the victory. To start off the year with doing so many things right on the field and being able to walk away with the win, that means something for the guys. They’re figuring out quite a bit, and it’s exciting.”

The Wildcats (2-0) got out to a quick start and took an early lead on Independence. In the opening minutes, senior Emmett White took advantage of a misplayed ball by the Bulldogs in the box and shot it past the goalie for a 1-0 advantage.

Independence got a goal of their own midway through the first half to tie it up, but the Wildcats responded with seconds left in the first half.

Senior Colton Blue hit a shot from the right side from 20 yards out that curved into the corner of the net to give the Wildcats the lead and the momentum at halftime. Fellow senior Will Showalter earned the assist on the play.

“That goal was a huge rallying point for us,” Bovaird said. “Getting a goal with under a minute left in the half gave us an incredible surge of confidence, and I’m sure it deflated the Independence kids a little. I’m not sure what was being said by their coach during halftime, but I know that Coach (Nick) White and I, along with our captains, were encouraged and positive with our halftime talk.

“We kicked off the second half with some dominating possession and consequent attacks. I’m really surprised we weren’t able to get a bunch more goals. It was just one of those nights, though. We had many great chances.”



Louisburg junior Caleb Feldkamp possesses the ball and looks for an open teammate Thursday at home.

Louisburg kept the Independence defense busy as it tallied 10 shots on goal and 26 shots on the night. Blue led the way with four shots on target, while Caleb Feldkamp and White each had two.

Independence finished the night with 14 shots, but the Wildcats controlled possession for much of the match.

“We figured out pretty quickly that their go-to play was to kick the ball long and chase it down,” Bovaird said. “There were some hiccups during the first half where we stopped playing our game and got into the habit of dribbling too much, but at halftime we talked to the team about what we needed to change.

“Our style is possession, passing, and moving to space. We let

the ball do the work and we force the other team to run like crazy. Last night we had a 75 percent pass success rate, we had 32 total pass strings, and we had 10 strings of 6 or more passes. Once we slowed things down and kept control of the ball, it was much easier to limit them."

The Wildcat back line of Ethan Sharp, Dan Minster, Mika McKitrick and Cole Clover also did their job limiting the Bulldogs' opportunities, along with subs Ryan Barbarich and Renner Erickson.



Louisburg senior defender Dan Minster clears the ball away from two Independence players Thursday during the Wildcats' home opener.

Louisburg goalie Evan Moreland also recorded three saves on the night.

"Each game so far, our back line has been learning and growing

together," Bovaird said. "The starting four are all seniors – Ethan, Cole, and Dan are big and strong guys and Mika has got the wrestler's mentality. Our defensive subs – Ryan Barberich and Renner Erickson – are both very smart players with great knowledge of the game. Those guys were doing great holding their line, communicating, and balancing out our defense.

"Evan Moreland has shown a lot of growth from last year as well. The more we play, the more they're going to figure out, and we're going to be limiting quite a few of our opponents' attacks."

Louisburg will try for its third straight win Tuesday when the Wildcats travel to Pittsburg. The match is set to begin at 6 p.m.