

# Wildcats battle No. 1 Baldwin in final regular season game



***Louisburg senior defender Cole Clover clears the ball from a Blue Valley player last Tuesday in Louisburg.***

BALDWIN CITY – It wasn't an easy task for Louisburg in its regular season finale Thursday at Baldwin.

The Wildcats had to square off with a Baldwin team that is ranked No. 1 in the state and just clinched a Frontier League title.

Early in the second half, the Wildcats had the momentum on their side and pushed the Bulldogs. Unfortunately for Louisburg, Baldwin eventually pulled away to hand the Wildcats a 5-2 loss.

"The boys showed a ton of grit and determination against Baldwin," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "Sure, the end

result wasn't what we wanted, but at the same time, that was some of the best soccer I've seen this group play in the last two years. We're getting ready for a run at state, and that means we have to look at each game one at a time."

Baldwin took a 2-0 lead early in the second half, but the Wildcats responded with a pair of goals of their own to get right back in the match.

Senior Colton Blue dribbled through the Baldwin defense off a throw in and found the back of the net to cut the Bulldog lead in half. A few moments later, the Wildcats struck again.

Sophomore Brody Bovaird was fouled in the box and Louisburg was awarded a penalty kick. Senior Emmett White converted the PK with 25 minutes remaining in the match and it was all tied up.

Louisburg continued its momentum on the defensive end a few minutes later. Baldwin was awarded a penalty kick of its own, but junior goalie Evan Moreland appeared to make a diving save.

However, the officials ruled that he left his line early and the Bulldogs were given another chance and they took advantage to make it a 3-2 contest.

"I'm at a loss regarding that PK," coach Bovaird said. "At that moment in the game, we had tied up the score 2-2, and we were clicking on all cylinders. It's tough to give up a penalty kick at any point in a game, but when Evan made the stop on the first one, that would have set a tone that Baldwin would have struggled to answer. Then, when the AR called it back, saying Evan had moved off the line prior to the kick, it had a very noticeable impact on the team.

"Everyone was working so hard defensively and offensively up until that point, but that subjective call definitely took a lot of our enthusiasm away. It was tough to bounce back after

that.”



***Louisburg junior Evan Moreland makes a diving save last Tuesday at home against Blue Valley.***

The Bulldogs tacked on two more scores to seal the win and the Wildcats finished the regular season with an 8-8 record.

It was the third straight loss for the Wildcats after falling to a Class 6A program in Blue Valley, 8-0, last Tuesday in Louisburg.

“Both games last week, despite them being losses that brought us to a .500 record, showed quite a bit about where we’re at right now,” coach Bovaird said. “Blue Valley is a much better team than their record suggests, and Baldwin is at the top of the 4A division. We made some great stands defensively against both teams, and our communication is definitely improving. We’re showing great movement off the ball, doing better at keeping possession as we transition to the attack.

“At this point in the season, some guys are getting banged up, and the great thing is that our bench depth was a huge plus—players came in ready and kept up the intensity, which is going to be crucial for us in the postseason.”

The postseason begins this Tuesday as the Wildcats earned the No. 8 seed in the Class 4-1A regional tournament. They will host No. 9 Chanute in a 6 p.m. start.

The winner will square off with the winner between No. 1 Baldwin and No. 16 Parsons for the regional championship later this week.

“This group is fired up,” Bovaird said. “There’s a predator mindset that’s set in with each of them – they’re focused on their goals and shutting out the distractions. Ever since last season ended, there’s been a lot of work being put in so that we can prove that the 2023 season was a fluke.

“I can’t quantify how many hours have been put in the weight room, on the practice field, and in giving attention to nutrition and health. This group has been studying the sport, they’ve been extremely coachable, and they are all determined to step up, give 100 percent, and leave it all on the field.”