

Young Wildcats look to rebuild after special season



Louisburg senior Brock Bila (1), who was a first team All-Frontier League player last season, is one of five returning starters for the Wildcats as they open their season Tuesday in Fort Scott.

It was a memorable ride for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team last season that ended with its third consecutive regional title and a spot in the state quarterfinals.

Expectations are always high with the Louisburg program, but the Wildcats have some reshuffling to do for this season as they have to replace 10 seniors off of last year's team – many of whom played key roles during their run.

The Wildcats return just five starters from a year ago and have 16 new faces to the program as they try to build chemistry for the 2018 season.

“This team is going to be vastly different than my previous two years,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We are very young. We have been doing a lot more teaching and explaining to make sure everyone is on the same page. It is a lot of fun watching these young men grow and get better. We will take our lumps I am sure, but this team has a very nice core of players that want to get better.”

Louisburg returns four seniors – Brock Bila, Eric Vazquez, Chris Williams and Eli Minster – but all four players saw a lot of varsity time a season ago.

Bila, who was a forward last season, was a first team All-Frontier League selection as he finished the year with 20 goals and five assists. He will see a lot of time at forward with Williams along with some midfield play as well.

Vazquez, along with Ryan Haight, Luke Faulkner, Logan Faulkner, Colin Cook, Benjamin Ratliff-Becher, David Perentis and Ethan Showalter will all see time in the midfield. Haight was a big part of the Wildcats' midfield last season and ended the year with honorable mention all-league honors.

One piece missing from that group is junior Landon Johnson, who suffered a leg injury in the offseason, and is expected to miss a lot of time this season. Johnson, who earned first-team all-league honors last season, led Louisburg with 15 assists last year to go along with six goals.

“The midfield will have a lot of options for us, which is great because it creates a lot of competition,” Conley said. “All of those guys will be fighting for a starting spot. The team is going to be wide open in regards to opportunity and winning and a spot. Landon will be very tough to replace, but he is improving each and every day.”



Senior Eli Minster (23) is a returning starter for the Wildcats on defense after also seeing time at the forward spot last season.

Defensively, the Wildcats are returning a pair of starters in Minster and junior William Frank. Sophomore Haden Yeager and freshman Michael Seufferling will complete the Wildcat back line.

Louisburg will also have a new goalie this season in junior Thomas Arnett, but fellow junior Garrett Rolofson is providing plenty of competition in practice as the team's backup according to Conley.

The Wildcats will try and get their season started on the right foot this week. Louisburg will travel to Fort Scott on Tuesday for a 4:30 p.m. matchup in their season opener and will host rival Paola on Thursday in its home debut.

Despite the lack of experience on the varsity level for many of the Wildcats, Conley believes this team can come into their own as the season goes along.

“This group will be held to the same standard that our previous team have been,” Conley said. “It will be difficult and hard, but this group of young men are capable to doing great things. As for being their coaches, we have been more patient and teaching a lot more. It is imperative to get all of our players on the same page.

“The boys need to work on their confidence and believe in one another. This team will be a team that grows throughout the year and gets better each and every time they play. We will be looking to shock some people.”

New rules create different vibe for first day of fall practice



The Louisburg High School football team opened the 2018 season with its first day of practice Monday and did so under different guidelines. Despite that, the Wildcats are excited for the start of the season.

On the horizon, it looked like a normal first day of practice.

More than 150 athletes took to their respective field, court or course to begin their journey to greatness Monday for the 2018 fall sports season. Excitement was abound and coaches were happy to be back with their players.

However, the first day of practice was a little bit different this year as the Kansas High School Activities Association implemented new fall heat acclimation rules in late July. The rules, applied to all sports, includes:

- Only one practice per day is permitted during the first five days of practice. All individuals shall only practice once per day for the first five days the individual practices, no matter when the person joins the team or if the person misses days due to injury/illness.
- No single practice may last longer than three hours. All warm-up, stretching, conditioning and weight lifting is included as part of the three-hour limit.
- A separate walkthrough is permitted in addition to the single practice. The walkthrough cannot be longer than one hour and must be separated from practice by at least three hours of rest. A walkthrough is defined as a teaching opportunity with the athletes in which no protective equipment is worn. No physically exerting activity, including any conditioning or weight lifting, may take place during the walkthrough.
- Beginning on practice day six, double practice sessions are permitted for any individual who has completed five days of single practices. Double practice sessions cannot be held on consecutive days. The day following a double practice day would be either a single practice day or a rest/recovery day.
- On days of multiple practices, no single practice may last longer than 3 hours and total practice time combined shall not exceed five hours.

- To be deemed a practice, a majority of the squad members must participate in the organized team training session.

Those rules left most of the coaches at Louisburg High School having to readjust how they run their practices or tryouts.

The Wildcat boys soccer team, which normally conditioned in the morning and worked on skills in the afternoon, were forced to cram everything into one practice.

“I am extremely frustrated with the new KSHSAA rule,” Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley said. “Before to protect the student athletes, we ran in the morning before the sun was up and when it was cooler out. Now we have to practice and condition in the afternoon in the heat of the day. Personally, I fill this will lead to more issues. It would be interesting to see who all was included in this decision and what the data said.”



Eli Minster passes a ball to a teammate during a drill Monday during the first official day of practice.

Louisburg volleyball, which also holds tryouts, had to split up the grade levels during the process. Senior and juniors had tryouts in the morning as a group, while sophomores and freshman practiced in the afternoon.

“In the past, we were able to put every athlete, freshman through senior, on the court at the same time and separate out the tested areas,” Louisburg volleyball coach Jessica Compliment said. “Physical testing had been in the morning with volleyball skill testing in the afternoon. Due to the change in the rule, we could no longer use that set up.

“It has forced a ‘split’ in the athletes because they can’t all work out together like they have been all summer long. Because of our numbers, and the tests we feel are necessary in order to make cuts and squad roster decisions, we need to run the athletes through each test. We would not have enough time to do that if we had kept them all together and brought them in for only one session. Which means the athletes are that more anxious and excited to finish tryouts and start the season with their teammates.”

There were also specific rule changes in regards to football, which forced Wildcat coach Robert Ebenstein to adjust his practice schedule as well, including the removal of two-a-days for the first week practice. Other changes include:

- Players must have a minimum of one day of rest/recovery during any week (Sunday- Saturday). Only injury treatments are permitted on a rest/recovery day.
- Days No. 1 and 2 of practice: Helmets only (air and bags only are permitted.)
- Days No. 3 and 4: Helmets and shoulder pads are permitted (Day 3: control permitted; Day 4: thud permitted.)

- Days 5 through Saturday of third week of practice: Full contact (air, bags, control, thud and live action permitted) may begin with exceptions that on any day involving multiple practices, only one practice may involve thud and/or live action.

“The changes with KSHSAA policies are what they are,” Ebenstein said. “I think they were created with good intentions. Personally I feel that our practice tendencies over the last few years have put player safety as the No. 1 priority always, so in that regard not a whole lot will change for us. You are allowed to do a separate ‘walk-through’ other than practice which we will still do every morning at 6 a.m., so we still have that old school two-a-day feeling just the approach of what we do and how we will do it has changed.

“The only thing that confused me is the purpose of the change is for heat acclimation, but the wording of it will force us to condition our players in the afternoon when it is hot instead of in the morning when it is typically cooler. But most all of our players have been working their tails off all summer and are already in pretty good shape.”

Despite the changes in practice, all four Wildcat programs are excited for what their season has in store. LHS had a large number of participants for the first day of fall practice as 163 athletes participated.

Ebenstein had 70 players attend the first day of practice, which is the highest number the Wildcats have had since he joined the staff in 2012. Louisburg also hopes to improve off its 6-3 record last season as they return 18 seniors, including several starters on both sides of the ball.

“Practice went well and it was good to finally get back on the field with the guys,” Ebenstein said. “We are very excited for this season, as in every team in the state. The thing that separates us is how players, managers and coaches alike all

really enjoy our time together. I am excited to coach, but I'm honestly excited to be around these coaches and kids again and give this season the best run we can."



LHS freshmen and sophomore volleyball players gather at center court during tryouts Monday.

On the volleyball side, the Lady Cats had 34 athletes show up for the first day of tryouts, which will end on Wednesday as Louisburg begins its quest to get back to the state tournament after finishing second a year ago.

"The first couple days are focused on running each athlete through a set of volleyball skills and physical skills tests," Compliment said. "The athletes did a good job for the first day, and we are looking forward to the next couple of days.

"Over the course of the summer, we had a lot of athletes participate in summer league matches, summer camps, team

camps, open gym and weights. They are ready to get the season going. There is a lot of excitement among the athletes and a lot of anticipation for the season.”

Coming off a spot in the state quarterfinals, the Wildcat boys soccer team had 38 athletes compete for a spot on the team as they try to make another run in the playoffs.

“It was nice to see so many kids out for the team,” Conley said. “The boys work incredibly hard and we very supportive of each other. With having so many new players coming out for the team, we did a lot of teaching and developing expectations for the drills and why we do things. It was actually the first time in three years the majority of the team completed the mile under six minutes, which was fantastic.

“It is a great time of the year with a lot of optimism. The boys were very upbeat and very focused on getting better. With only four seniors, we are extremely young and we will need to do a lot of teaching.”



Trinity Moore (center) leads a pack of runners during the first day of practice Monday at LHS.

As for cross country, numbers have dwindled a little for head coach John Reece as he has close to 25 runners out this season, but he has a good group of runners coming back, including state medalist Trinity Moore.

The girls team is also hoping to make a return trip to state this season after qualifying for the first time in school history last year.

“The first practice was great,” Reece said. “We are going to have more girls than boys, but it seems like they are in shape and ready to start training for our first race.”

“The kids are jazzed about the season and the girls are wanting to do even better than last year. I believe success builds the team numbers.”

Hinkle ready to take on role as LHS activities director



Walking into Scott Hinkle's office, it doesn't appear he started a new job two weeks ago.

The moving boxes are mostly gone. His desk is organized with everything in its place, along with a calendar crammed full of upcoming events.

Hinkle is not shy to tell people about his love for the Boston Red Sox. Sitting on one wall are two older chairs from Fenway Park, along other memorabilia.

The one thing that Hinkle hasn't caught up on is his efforts to get some purple gear. An avid Kansas Jayhawk fan, he hasn't had need to purchase any purple flair in the past. Seems like that will change shortly as he was hired as the new activities director and assistant principal at Louisburg High School earlier this summer.

"I have been a Jayhawk fan all my life," Hinkle said. "It will be a little weird to wear purple that is for sure, but I am sure I will get used to it. Before I left my old job, people found out where I was going so they started giving me little gifts with purple on it, like markers and stuff like that. They definitely got a kick out of that."

Hinkle takes over for Jeremy Holloway, who was promoted to principal at LHS and becomes the third activities director in as many years to take over that spot.

“My wife has family in Kansas City and I have family in Wichita and so we were looking to come this way,” Hinkle said. “I had a couple friends that told me that the Louisburg position had opened up. I had heard of Louisburg a long time ago. I actually coached at Ottawa University in the early 90s and was familiar with the area. I came up, interviewed and here I am. It has obviously worked out well.

“Everyone has been so helpful and friendly and it is a good time to be coming to Louisburg. I am excited to be here.”

Before taking the job in Louisburg, Hinkle had spent the last 22 years in the Liberal school district in a variety of roles. He served as the boys high school basketball coach, along with nine years as an activities director, a year as the head girls basketball coach at the local community college and last year he served as assistant principal at the high school.

Hinkle graduated from Valley Center High School, and went on from there to earn his bachelor’s degree from Friends University, where he played basketball, and his master’s from the University of Kansas.

Basketball has always been a passion for Hinkle, but during his time as activities director at Liberal, he had a chance to learn the life of other sports as well.

“Liberal changed a lot from when I first got there in the mid 90s when they were a football and track powerhouse,” Hinkle said. “There were just athletes galore, but the culture kind of changed. We were really good in soccer and decent in track and volleyball. We still had good kids and good athletes, but it was a big transition as far as sports go when I first got there. My kids grew up there and being involved and being able to watch their events was something that has always appealed

to me.

“Basketball has always been in my blood. Other than my nine years as athletic director, I have coached in some capacity and I am a big basketball fan. Obviously, being an athletic director I am just a big sports fan in general.”

Still new in town, Hinkle is still trying to get to know his coaching staff, but he is excited about the situation he is walking into with the Wildcats finishing as state runner-ups in volleyball and girls soccer last season. Several cross country, golf, wrestling and track athletes also earned state medals.

However, if there is one thing he wanted to relay to everyone is that he wants to give his coaches the freedom to run their programs.

“I want to let the coaches, coach,” he said. “I am not going to be the guy that says this is how we did things in Liberal and I am not that type of leader. If it comes to the point where they need some advice, I want to be a resource for them. I don’t want to be someone that is looking for something.

“I have met a few of the coaches. I have let them know that I am here if they need anything. I have stopped by the weight room to speak to a few coaches and some have stopped by to introduce themselves. I am still learning names and faces. We have a coaches meeting on the 10th and I will see and learn a lot more about them then.”

With all the success the Wildcats had last season in the sports arena, Hinkle is happy to be a part of the LHS family and is learning new things about the town every day.

“I have heard all types of things,” he said. “I have heard they take football pretty seriously here. I know they were state runner-up in volleyball and girls soccer last year and that is an exciting thing to walk into. I think expectations

are obviously high in those sports, but I think everyone always has high expectations. I am not going to do anything different than normal and I am just going to sit back and observe for a while and take it all in.”

Hinkle will experience some different things along with his new position. This season, the Frontier League will welcome three new teams – Bonner Springs, Piper and Tonganoxie – and will say goodbye to De Soto.

Another big change will be the postseason formats with several sports as the Kansas State High School Activities Association reshuffled their classification system, eliminating Class 4A-Division II.

“With the changes in the league, the classification system and being a new AD, it is probably a good time to be coming on,” Hinkle said. “The learning curve is going to be the same for all of us.

“I walked into a good situation for scheduling because (Holloway) already had everything all taken care of,” he said. “I think the dynamics of the league are going to change. Liberal’s former girls basketball coach is the coach at Piper and I know a little bit about them. As far as the programs and rivalries, that is something that is going to come with time.”

Even with all the changes in his life – moving, starting a new job, getting to know new faces – Hinkle is ready for what lies ahead and the staff at Louisburg has helped with that transition.

“It has been a whirlwind and it has been information overload,” he said. “It is a lot of the same things I did in Liberal as athletic director, I just haven’t done it for the last five years. Being an assistant principal at Liberal last year, I think, helped me prepare for the principal side.

“People have just gone out of their way to be helpful. From

the administration to the custodial staff to the secretaries, everyone has been super helpful. When I was out around town, people have welcomed me and it has been a friendly feel everywhere I have been.”

Wildcat boys soccer uses summer to ease new faces into program



Louisburg’s Eli Minster settles a ball in a passing drill during the Wildcats’ team camp on July 10. The Wildcats introduced a lot of fresh faces to the program this summer after losing more than 10 players off of last season’s team.

This summer has been a little different than Louisburg High School boys soccer coach Kyle Conley has been used to.

In recent years, Conley has seen waves of experienced upperclassmen come through his program, which has led to back-to-back regional titles and a fourth place finish at state.

However, this time around Conley noticed those waves aren’t as high as in year’s past when he started his summer conditioning program with his team. When he began his team camp on July 9,

he had 37 players sign up – which nearly half of those were either freshmen or new players to the program.

After graduating 10 players from last season's regional championship team, Conley realizes this summer is important to this year's squad and he has liked what he has seen thus far.

"I felt each day of camp we improved and got better," Conley said. "The boys had positive attitudes and were very coachable. Because of so many new kids to our program, we went about to square one and worked on technique. We spent a lot of time teaching the boys our way of doing things."

Fundamentals was a starting point for Conley this summer as he tried to get the players accustomed to playing at a high level in high school. The Wildcats spent the week-long camp going over several different aspects in order to get ready for their season, which will begin in late August.



Louisburg head coach Kyle Conley goes over a drill during the Wildcats' team camp last week.

"We spent a massive amount of time working on our technique and our speed of play," Conley said. "This season will require a lot of teaching so we started with phase one. The boys did a great job of progressing and improving. It will be fun to watch this team grow throughout the season."

As if introducing a number of new players to the varsity level this season wasn't going to be difficult enough, the Wildcats lost one of their top returning players before the season even started.

Junior midfielder Landon Johnson sustained a severe leg injury a couple months ago and will miss at least half, if not the entire season for Louisburg. Johnson was going to be a focal point in the midfield for the Wildcats as he is a two-year starter that earned first team All-Frontier League and second team all-state honors last season.

"Losing Landon is a big blow, but we will play with the next man up mentality," Conley said, "We have some quality players and returners and they will rise to the occasion and fill the void. Landon is a tremendous player and will be very difficult to replace."

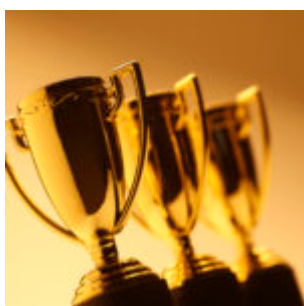
Although Conley's work with them is all but complete until the first day of practice next month, the Wildcats will still continue to work in the weight room and go through individual sessions on their own as they prepare for what will be a difficult schedule with the new additions of Frontier League members Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs.

Despite the obstacles that are in store for the Wildcats this upcoming season, Conley is looking forward to what he has returning.

"This team is going to be extremely young, but these boys have

that blue collar work ethic and mentality,” he said. “They are coachable and always work hard. I am excited to see how these boys progress.”

2018 Male Athlete of the Year Nominees



For the past two years, Louisburg Sports Zone has given out Athlete of the Week awards during each of the three sports seasons. I do it to recognize special athletic achievements and highlight them a little bit. So this year, I wanted to take it a step further.

This year Louisburg Sports Zone will be handing out an Athlete of the Year honor to a male and female athlete at Louisburg High School. I wanted the opportunity to recognize those who exemplify what it means to be an “athlete.”

Although I am giving out the award, I wanted the process to subjective, so I asked the head coaches at LHS to help me out. I asked each coach to send me nominations of who they thought exemplified the Athlete of the Year honor. They will then vote for their top 3 male and female and then I will tabulate the results and determine the winner. In the next couple of weeks, I will announce this year recipient.

Below are the male nominees for this year’s award in

alphabetical order by last name. Congrats to all those who were nominated and best of luck!

2018 LOUISBURG SPORTS ZONE MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR NOMINEES



Blue Caplinger – Junior – Football, Wrestling, Track and Field

Caplinger played a big role for the Wildcat football team as he shared quarterback duties to start the year and then moved over to the tight end spot, but his biggest impact came on defense where he earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors. He finished the season with 32 tackles and two interceptions from his secondary spot.

On the wrestling mat, Caplinger was a state qualifier for the Wildcats at 160 pounds and finished his season with a 34-14 record. He won titles at two different tournaments and holds the team record with most career reversals with 71.

Caplinger also fared well on the track where he ran sprints and relays for Louisburg. Caplinger was a member of the 4×400-meter relay team that finished seventh in the state in Class 4A, and also ran on the 4×100-meter relay team that qualified for the Kansas Relays.



Cade Holtzen – Freshman – Cross Country, Wrestling, Track and Field

Holtzen thrived on the wrestling mat this past season as he earned the Wildcats' lone state medal. He finished sixth overall at 113 pounds and became the second freshman in school

history to place at state with a 45-6 record.

He also broke two team records in the process. Holtzen currently holds the mark for most wins in a season (45), most nearfall-2 (23). He also led the Wildcats in five other statistical categories.

Holtzen was a Frontier League and regional runner-up and won tournament titles at four different competitions.

He also ran on the Louisburg varsity cross country team and ran distance races for the Wildcat track team.



Austin Moore – junior – football, wrestling, track and field

On the football team, Moore was named a team captain and had

success on both sides of the ball. As a running back, he recorded 1,215 yards and 15 touchdowns. Defensively, he tallied more than 70 tackles from the linebacker spot.

Moore was named to the all-Frontier League first team on both sides of the ball and was an honorable mention all-state selection by the Topeka-Capital Journal and Wichita Eagle. He was also named an all-state, all-purpose player by K-Preps. Moore was also selected as the team's Offensive Player of the Year and recipient of the BAC Award.

On the wrestling mat, he was also a team captain and recorded a 43-7 record. Moore was a state qualifier at 195 pounds and was a regional runner-up. He won the team's Workhorse Award and set a program record with 38 pins. Moore also had the highest GPA on the team.

Moore threw the javelin for the Wildcat track and field team as recorded a season best throw of 151 feet in the regional meet and finished eighth.



John Wyatt Reece – Senior – Cross Country, Track and Field

Reece became the first state cross country medalist in several years for Louisburg High School. He finished 11th overall at the Class 4A meet in Wamego to earn a medal and also earned all-state honors for his effort.

He also finished runner-up in the Frontier League meet and currently holds the third fastest time in school history. He earned first-team all-league honors. Reece also competed at the CCCNC National Race where he medaled individually and was a part of the second place team.

In track, Reece qualified for state in the 1,600 and 3,200-meter runs and finished ninth at state in the 3,200. He was also a regional runner-up in both events.

Reece was a Kansas Relays qualifier and medalist in the 2,000-meter steeplechase and currently holds the school record.

Reece has signed with Southwest Minnesota State next season and will run for the Mustangs starting next fall.



Madden Rutherford – Sophomore – Football, Basketball, Baseball

Rutherford took over the starting quarterback role as a sophomore for the Wildcat football team and became a dual-threat athlete at that position. He finished with 670 yards through the air and had eight touchdowns. On the ground, he racked up 318 yards and two more touchdowns. His performance helped him to a second-team honor on the all-Frontier League

team.

On the baseball diamond, Rutherford was the Wildcats' top pitcher on the season and also did his job out on in the field as he earned second team all-Frontier League honors as an outfielder. Rutherford started six games this season and pitched 28 innings with a 5.12 earned run average and struck out 23 batters. At the plate, he finished the season with a .408 average, three doubles, a triple, a home run and had 10 RBIs. He also ended the year with only three errors in 19 games.

Rutherford also saw a lot of varsity time for the Wildcat basketball team as he played in 17 games.



Grant Ryals – Senior – Soccer, Golf

Ryals led the Louisburg boys soccer team as he garnered first team all-league and all-state honors this past season. He served as team captain the past two seasons and scored seven goals and had 11 assists from the midfield spot.

His 11 assists put him fourth in the all-time Louisburg single season record and his 23 career assists place him second all-time.

Ryals will continue his soccer career at William Jewell College next season.

Ryals was also a member of the Louisburg varsity golf team and was a part of several runner-up team finishes with the Wildcats.

Rose's love for soccer takes him to Coffeyville



Louisburg senior Jarod Rose made it official earlier this month when he signed his letter of intent to play soccer at Coffeyville Community College in the fall.

Just two years ago, Jarod Rose had never played organized soccer.

However, he joined the Louisburg soccer team as a junior in hopes of seeing what it was all about. It turned out to be a pretty good decision.

Five months from now, the Wildcat senior will be heading off to play college soccer.

Rose made it official on March 14 when he signed his letter of intent to play soccer at Coffeyville Community College, but it wasn't always the easiest choice to make.

"What took me so long to make a decision was whether I wanted to be that far away from everyone," Rose said. "But once I got over that, it was a pretty easy choice and I am excited about it. I went down there to practice with the team so I could see how they play. It was really intense, but I think it went pretty well."

Rose played a part in the Wildcats' success this past season as they won the program's seventh regional championship and advanced to the state quarterfinals. He started eight of the Wildcats' 19 games and during that span he finished with three goals and two assists from his midfield spot.



Senior Jarod Rose signed his letter of intent on March 14 to play soccer at Coffeyville. Seated next to Jarod is his mother Amy and his father Mike. Standing is Louisburg head coach Kyle Conley, Jarod's sister Cierra and Wildcat assistant Michael Pickman.

Despite only playing for two years, his appreciation for the sport has grown and he is excited to be able to continue his soccer journey thanks in part to his time with the Louisburg program.

"I have just kind of fell in love with it," he said. "It is my favorite sport now. I had a lot of fun playing here and I have never had as much fun playing a sport as I did playing soccer at Louisburg."

Part of that, Rose said, was playing for Wildcat coach Kyle Conley. Rose saw similar traits between Coffeyville coach Jerrid Schicke and Conley, which the move a little more comfortable for him.

Coffeyville finished with a 4-9-4 record last season, with a

bulk of its matches coming in the Jayhawk Conference. Rose hopes to fit on the Raven team in the midfield.

Soccer, however, won't be the only thing occupying his time. Rose also plans on joining the choir at Coffeyville and is looking forward to that opportunity as well.

"I talked to music teacher while I was there and she told me if I didn't get a scholarship for soccer that she would give me one," Rose said. "There is a show choir down there and I am pretty excited to be able to do that too."

Ryals ready for next step with William Jewell



Louisburg senior Grant Ryals made it official on Feb. 7 when he signed his letter of intent to play soccer at William Jewell, a Division II program in Liberty, Mo. Ryals was a first-team all-league and all-state selection this past season for the Wildcats.

The process for finding the right home was a taxing one at times for Louisburg senior Grant Ryals.

Ryals spent the last couple of years going to showcase camps

and taking college visits trying to figure out what school was going to be the best fit for him. Then on the night before he was to sign his letter of intent, he was trying to find a pen with his new school's name on it.

In what was supposed to be an easy task, it instead became an arduous one.

"We actually found seven other pins from different schools but not the one I was looking for," Ryals said. "That just showed how long of a process it has been and getting this offer is one of the best days of my life."

That offer came from William Jewell and Ryals made it official on Feb. 7 when he signed to play soccer for the Division II program based in Liberty, Mo.

Although Ryals was presented with several different options for his soccer future, he couldn't pass up an opportunity to help out the Cardinal program.

"The program is really good," Ryals said. "The coach likes to recruit kids that are somewhat close, so that when everyone gets there, we are familiar with are surroundings since we are all from the same area. I know the team has had some struggles, but they are still fairly new to Division II, and the conference is very competitive. That is one of the things I liked about Jewell the most is we know that every game is going to be close and that it will be competitive."

William Jewell finished with a 3-14 record this past season under second-year coach Garrett Jahn and Ryals sees the Cardinals as building into something good in the Great Lakes Valley Conference.



Grant Ryals signed his letter intent in front of family and friends on Feb. 7 at LHS. Seated (front row, from left) his father Jason Ryals, Grant, his mother Janelle Ryals and his brother Layne. Standing (from left) is Grant's club coach Rich Jones, Louisburg head coach Kyle Conley and assistant Michael Pickman.

Ryals, who played in the defensive midfield for Louisburg, hopes to play in the same spot for the Cardinals in the future, but he realizes a lot can change.

"They play a 3-5-2 so there will probably be a lot of midfield options," Ryals said. "I know the coach was looking for a lot of midfielders and he said he saw me on the travel squad coming in, but you never know. I still have to work my way into a position."

Ryals was key fixture on the Louisburg team the past two seasons as he helped the Wildcats to their first state semifinal appearance in 2016 and back-to-back regional championships in 2016 and 2017.

He was named to the all-Frontier League first team the last two seasons and Ryals earned first-team all-state honors as a senior and was selected to the second team as a junior. Ryals finished his senior season with 13 goals and 15 assists.

“He was our leader and motivator the past two years,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “He had the ability to get others to believe in our goal and to push to that level. He is an even better young man. I am extremely proud of him and how he has grown as a player and person over the past two seasons.”

Even though William Jewell was a good soccer fit for Ryals, he was also looking for the right spot academically and it also factored big into his decision. He plans on majoring in biomedical engineering.

“There were a lot of other schools that I enjoyed, but it was all about find the right school academically and other things,” Ryals said. “I really liked William Jewell because they were smaller and had a really good graduate program, so my job experience and opportunities were better there as well. Plus, it was close to home and that was a big factor too.”

Now it is all about finishing out his senior year at Louisburg and preparing himself for college soccer in the fall. Ryals is excited for what the future holds.

“Academically, I just want to keep getting good grades and soccer wise I just want to enjoy my time,” he said. “I have worked hard to get into the position where I am at and I just want to enjoy the ride.”

OPINION: 2017 was a banner year for Louisburg



Having the opportunity to cover Louisburg High School athletics, for what has been almost 10 years now, I have seen a lot of different highs and lows.

I have been lucky enough to cover state championship teams and watched several athletes perform at the highest level. However, this last year has to be one for the record books when it comes to success at Louisburg High School.

For Wildcat athletics, 2017 was a banner year for many reasons.

Louisburg qualified for the state tournament in three different sports – volleyball, girls soccer and boys basketball – and the first two each placed in the top four.

The volleyball team was just a point away from winning the school's first state title after the Lady Cats finished second to defending state champion Rose Hill, and tied for the best finish in school history.

The Wildcat girls soccer team qualified for the state semifinals in just its second year of existence and suffered a heartbreaking 1-0 loss in the semifinals to eventually take fourth overall.

In boys basketball, the Wildcats qualified for the state tournament for the first time in 12 years despite getting

knocked out in the first round by defending state champion Bishop Miege.

Most schools would love to have that success with their athletic programs, but for Louisburg, that was just the tip of the iceberg. As special as the seasons were for those three programs, the Wildcats also thrived in a few other sports.

Louisburg's cross country program, which has been around for 19 years, had the best season in its history – by far. Not only did the Wildcats have three state medalists for the first time ever, but it had a year that featured the school's first female league champion in Trinity Moore and the best league finish by a male, Wyatt Reece, who took second.

Tim Smith continued the Wildcat success as he became the school's first regional cross country champion, and Moore, Reece and Smith each went on to win a state medal. Moore and Smith also set school records for the fastest time.

The Wildcats also qualified the girls team for the first time in school history as Moore, Carlee Gassman, Reilly Alexander, Isabelle Holtzen, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams took third at regionals and eventually 10th at state.

The Wildcat wrestling team tied a program best by qualifying eight for the state tournament and came back with a medal by Ryan Adams, who finished sixth.

Louisburg's track and field team persevered and qualified for state in 10 events and had two regional champions in Quinn Rigney and Chris Williams. Isabelle Holtzen and T.J. Dover each brought home their first state track medals.

The boys soccer team was one goal away from making its second consecutive trip to the state semifinals, but their run was halted by a loss to McPherson in state quarterfinals. Still, the Wildcats won a regional title, which was the seventh in team history.

Freshman Calvin Dillon led the Wildcat golf team this past year and recorded the program's first state medal in more than decade as he took 10th overall.

All these things and more I described in detail when releasing my top 10 stories of the year and what a year it was.

Obviously, I haven't had a chance to look through all the results, but I can't imagine a more successful year for LHS when you are talking about athletics. There may have been years in the 70s, 80s and 90s that I don't know about, but I find it hard to imagine one that tops 2017.

Sure, the 2010-11 school year featured two state championship teams in football and boys track and field and that was a fantastic time to be Wildcat, but as far as calendar years go, 2017 was one to remember.

Even outside the sports world, Louisburg High School put together many great accomplishments as the Wildcat Marching Band was selected to participate in the Tournament of Roses Parade and put on a great show for the nation on New Year's Day.

Then in October, the FFA Food Science team of Hallie Hutsell, Faith Seuferling, Addie Katzer and Hattie Harris won a national championship, while Hutsell and Seuferling placed second and third in the nation, respectively.

I don't get a lot of opportunities to cover programs or groups outside the sports world, but these are fantastic accomplishments and deserved to be recognized.

For me, 2017 was a whirlwind. It seemed around every corner, school history was being made and there aren't many schools around the state that can boast about the successes Louisburg has experienced.

It was an honor for me to cover many of these historic runs in

Wildcat history and I hope you all realize how lucky you have it. Louisburg is a school filled with great coaches who care about the student athletes.

Believe me, I know how fortunate I am to be able to be a part of something special and this place is it. If 2018 is half of what 2017 was, it will be a fun ride.

I can't wait for what 2018 has in store and hopefully you all will follow along to see what these Wildcats can accomplish.

Top 10 Stories of 2017



It was a successful, and eventful, 2017 for Louisburg High School athletics and for those who are connected to the Wildcat program. This past year created a lot of school history for LHS and several programs brought back state hardware to Louisburg.

Below are the Top 10 stories from 2017, along with a brief explanation of each. Included in the explanation is the link to the actual story from the event.

This year was a blast to cover and I was blessed to have the opportunity to go along for the ride with many of these. As much fun as it was, I can't wait for 2018 to begin. Looking forward to it!



Louisburg's Calvin Dillon earns his first state golf medal as a freshman as he took 10th at the state meet.

10. Dillon medals at state golf

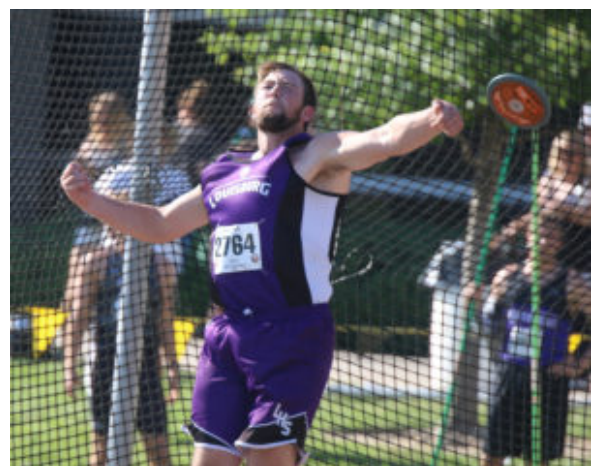
Louisburg freshman Calvin Dillon certainly didn't play like a first-year varsity player as he led the Wildcat golf team all season. Dillon finished 10th at the Class 4A state tournament in Wamego and became the first Wildcat golfer to earn a state medal in several years.

Dillon made the state tournament alongside senior Ty Martin, who finished in 28th place overall after he earned his second straight state appearance.



Isabelle Holtzen earned her first state medal in the pole vault as she took seventh back in May.

9. Holtzen, Dover earn first state track medals



T.J. Dover finished eighth

**in the discus at the Class
4A Kansas State Track and
Field Championships in
Wichita.**

Junior Isabelle Holtzen and senior T.J. Dover both ended their track and field seasons on a good note as they earned state medals in late May at the Class 4A state meet in Wichita.

Holtzen had a big season in the pole vault as she ended seventh in the state after she cleared 10 feet. Earlier in the year, Holtzen broke a 15-year old school record in the pole vault as she topped 11-1.

Dover made his second consecutive trip to the state meet and finished strong in his final high school performance. He took eighth with a throw of 143-4.

The Wildcats qualified for the state meet in 10 events and had two regional champions in junior Quinn Rigney (100-meter dash) and sophomore Chris Williams (400 dash).



8. Frontier League adds three schools, says goodbye to another

For the Frontier League, 2017 brought a lot of changes to a league that has featured seven schools for the last several years.

Starting in the 2018-19 season, the Frontier League will add three new schools. Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs each accepted invitations to join the league last April to create a 10-team league.

It is didn't stay 10 teams for long as De Soto will make the move to a different league during the same season. The current league will be made up of nine schools: Louisburg, Paola, Ottawa, Spring Hill, Baldwin, Eudora, Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs.



7. Louisburg boys soccer wins regional crown

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team was trying to make its second consecutive trip to the state tournament this past season and the Wildcats almost got there.

Although the Wildcats fell to McPherson in the state quarterfinal game in late October, Louisburg put together another successful season that included a 1-0 victory over Independence in the regional championship game.

The Wildcats finished the season with a 13-6 record and earned the school's first Frontier League championship since 2010.



Junior Ryan Adams celebrates after he earned a state medal at 138 pounds.

6. Wildcat wrestling qualifies eight for state, Adams picks up medal

The Louisburg High School wrestling team had an historic season as it qualified eight for the Class 4A state wrestling tournament, which tied for the most in school history, during the regional tournament in February at Frontenac High School

Thad Hendrix (106 pounds), Nathan Keegan (120), Kyle Allen (126), Ryan Adams (138), Dylan Meyer (145), Austin Moore (170), Austin Raetzel (195) and Mason Koechner (285) all competed at the state tournament in Salina.

Adams earned the school's lone state medal on the season as he finished sixth overall at 138 pounds.



Louisburg head football and boys track and field coach Gary Griffin retired from the district after 32 years. It was one of many changes for the LHS athletic department.

5. LHS goes through staff/coaching changes

The 2017-18 school year looked a lot of different than in previous years for Louisburg High School athletics.

LHS saw a lot of changes in its coaching staff and in the administration as well. Activities director Darin Gagnebin stepped down and was replaced by current director Jeremy Holloway.

In the coaching department, former head and assistant football Gary Griffin retired from the district after 32 years with the high school and Louisburg promoted assistant Robert Ebenstein

as the new Wildcat head football coach.

Jason Nelson resigned his post as the Wildcat head boys basketball coach and he was replaced with Ty Pfannenstiel. Griffin and Greg Darrington also resigned as the boys and girls track and field coaches, and were replaced by Andy Wright (boys) and John Reece (girls).



Louisburg cross country runners (from left) Tim Smith, Trinity Moore and Wyatt Reece each ended the season with a state medal.

4. LHS cross country earns three state medals, qualifies girls team

The Louisburg High School cross country team might have had

its best season in its 19-year history in 2017.

The Wildcats thrived against some of the state's best competition as seniors Wyatt Reece, Tim Smith and sophomore Trinity Moore all earned state medals at the Class 4A meet in Wamego.

Moore recorded the highest finish for a female runner in school history as she finished fifth in the state and broke her own school record in the process with a time of 19 minutes and 47 seconds.

In the boys race, Reece picked up his first state medal with a time of 17 minutes and finished 11th overall. Smith, who won a regional title the week before, came in 15th with a time of 17:05. Smith was the first Wildcat to win a regional title in school history.

Louisburg also made history as the Wildcat girls team qualified for the state meet for the first time after they finished third at their regional in Burlington. Moore joined Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Carlee Gassman, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams to make up the seven-member squad that finished 10th in the team standings at state.

Earlier in the year, Moore became the school's first Frontier League champion, while Reece recorded the highest league finish in boys history as he took second at the league meet.



3. Louisburg boys basketball earns first state tournament berth in 12 years

The season may not have started out the way the Louisburg boys basketball team would have liked, but it certainly finished on a positive note.

Louisburg knocked off rival Paola in the sub-state semifinals and then defeated Fort Scott in the championship game in early March to earn its first sub-state championship since 2005.

The Wildcats earned the No. 6 seed and squared off with eventual champion Bishop Miege at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. The Stags ended the Wildcats' season with an 81-47 loss.



2. LHS girls soccer finishes fourth at state tournament

Louisburg's girls soccer program has only been around for two years, but the Wildcats have set high expectations from the beginning and that continued in 2017.

The Wildcats advanced to the Class 4-1A state semifinals for the first time in school history as they defeated Piper with a 2-1 victory in overtime. This victory came off their second consecutive regional title as they knocked off Bonner Springs.

At the state tournament, Louisburg faced off with Thomas More Prep and suffered a heart-breaking 1-0 loss in the semifinals. The Wildcats moved on to the third-place game against Maize South and eventually finished fourth overall.



1. Lady Cat volleyball ends season as state runner-up

The Louisburg High School volleyball team was just one point away from not only becoming the school's first state volleyball champion – but also the first female team to win a state title in Louisburg history.

As close as the Lady Cats got, they came up just short against defending state champion Rose Hill in late October at the Class 4A-Division I state championship. Louisburg fell 23-25, 25-10 and 29-27 in heartbreaking fashion to finish as the state runner-up.

Still, it was an impressive season for Louisburg volleyball as it finished with a 34-10 record. The Lady Cats reeled off wins over Basehor-Linwood, Bishop Miege and Rose Hill in pool play and then downed Wellington in the state semifinals.

The Lady Cats received several accolades as junior Anna Dixon

and senior Sophie McMullen earned first team all-state and all-league honors. Dixon was also named as the Co-Player of the Year in Class 4A-Division I.

Junior Carson Buffington was also named to the all-state tournament team with Dixon and McMullen.

All-league, all-state honors roll in for Wildcat soccer



Louisburg senior Grant Ryals had a special season for the Wildcats and he was recognized for that as he earned first team All-Frontier League and all-state honors.

Winning its first Frontier League title since 2010 certainly has its perks for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

Maybe the biggest for the Wildcats is the recognition they received when the All-Frontier League teams were released earlier this month. Louisburg earned seven spots between the three teams and the Wildcats put four players on the first team.

Seniors Grant Ryals, Ambrose Stefan, junior Brock Bila and sophomore Landon Johnson were all named first team all-league

and senior Kris Light was named to the second team. Senior Scott Murphy and sophomore Ryan Haight were selected as honorable mentions.

Although the Wildcats were league champions, De Soto led the way with eight all-league selections and Louisburg followed with seven.

“Being league champions is a fantastic honor,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “It just shows how good of a team we were, especially because of all the parody within our league. We were consistent and did our job each and every night. They boys worked their butts off and earned this.

“The all-league honors were fantastic. None of those young men though would have earned honors without their teammates. Their teammates made it possible for them to be honored. The boys that were honored did deserve this and had great seasons. I think getting four kids first team all-league shows how special of a season we had.”



Senior goalie Ambrose Stefan was named to the All-Frontier League and all-state first teams after recording 80 saves on the season.

The honors for the Wildcats didn't stop there as the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association all-state teams were released Sunday. Ryals and Stefan were named to the Class 4-1A all-state first team, while Bila and Johnson were given second team honors. Light was selected to the honorable mention team.

Ryals led the Wildcats from the midfield spot all season. Although he finished the year with seven goals and 11 assists, he did a lot for Louisburg to get the attack started and was a vital player as a defensive midfielder.

"Grant started every game for us this year," Conley said. "He was our only returning captain from the previous season. He played nearly every minute of every game for us. He is our best player and our leader. He did a nice job of getting our

possession started and his vision of the field is exceptional.”

As for Stefan, the Wildcat goalie thrived in the net as he ended the regular season with 80 saves and gave up just 17 goals – five of which were on penalty kicks.

“Ambrose picked up where he left off last year,” Conley said. “He is an individual who would work countless hours to improve his craft. His defense did a fantastic job to limit those opportunities, but he came up big when he needed to.”



Junior Brock Bila led Louisburg with 20 goals on the season from the forward spot and was named all-league first team and second team all-state.

Bila, who transferred to Louisburg last December, made a big impact for the Wildcats at the forward spot as he led the team with 20 goals on to go along with five assists.

Johnson also gave the Wildcats consistent play from the midfield position as he set up a lot of the Louisburg scores. Johnson finished with a team-high 15 assists to go along with six goals.

“Brock was a transfer player that moved in last December,” Conley said. “He struggled at first to figure out our system of play and expectations. He has had a decent year and has a high work rate. Brock is a fantastic young man.

“Landon is a very talented young player with exceptional skill. His vision and creativity is second to none. He replaced Noah Juarez off of last year’s team, and he made us more dangerous as a team with his vision.”



Junior midfielder Landon Johnson had a team-high 15 assists for the Wildcats and was named first team all-league and second team all-state.

Louisburg's defense also received recognition as Light was second team all-league from his centerback spot, while Murphy (outside back) and Haight (defensive midfielder) found a spot on honorable mention.

It was a defense that allowed just 19 goals on the season.

"Kris was a forward before last year," Conley said. "I made him a centerback and he had a nice season. This year he was voted captain by his teammates and was our leader in the back. Kris won almost every 50/50 tackle and about every ball in the air. More impressive to me, he would look to find feet with his passes and allowed our team to attack.



Senior Kris Light (12) played a big role on defense for Louisburg as he earned second team all-league and honorable mention all-state for his

efforts.

“Ryan is clearly our most improved player. He got on a club team after last season and has gotten 1,000 times better. He plays with the highest work rate of anyone on our team. He was responsible typically for defending your team’s most talented offensive player and he excelled.

“Scott was absolutely a shutdown outside back for us,” Conley said. “He played so hard and bailed us out tremendously on balls played to the side. He make countless goal saving tackles. Of the goals we have given up as a team, Scott was responsible for only three. He did a fantastic job, and I would argue that he could be the best outside back in our league.”



Outside back Scott Murphy (left) and defensive midfielder Ryan Haight each received honorable mention all-league honors.

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE SOCCER

First Team

Ethan Rodriguez, De Soto, senior

Grant Ryals, Louisburg, senior

Blayne Chapman, Baldwin, senior

Ryan Wokutch, Paola, sophomore

Daniel Apple, De Soto, junior

Jon Bock, Eudora, senior

Brock Bila, Louisburg, junior

Landon Johnson, Louisburg, sophomore

Bryce Towels, Spring Hill, senior

Carson Brier, De Soto, junior

Goalie: Ambrose Stefan, Louisburg, senior

Second Team

Luka Maski, Paola, junior

Cameron Elphick, Baldwin, senior

Tanner Gerstberger, Spring Hill, senior

Jon Villaboas, Paola, sophomore

Nicholas Gulley, Spring Hill, junior

Phillip Pyle, Eudora, senior

Rohan Singh, De Soto, junior

Kris Light, Louisburg, senior

Dylan Jamison, Baldwin, junior

Asher Walker, Spring Hill, senior

Goalie: Matt Hooker, Spring Hill, senior

Honorable mention

Kasey Spigle, Ottawa, senior

James Henggeler, De Soto, sophomore

Ryan Haight, Louisbug, sophomore

Scott Murphy, Louisburg, senior

Grady McCune, Baldwin, freshman

Isaac Bones, Ottawa, junior

Will Younkin, Eudora, senior

Caden Willits, Eudora, sophomore

Andrew Goodman, De Soto, senior

Matthew Jackson, Baldwin, junior

Sean Eggers, De Soto, junior

Goalie: Blake Webber, De Soto, senior; Matt Greiner, Ottawa, senior