

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 be 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's 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 Jerrod 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

Wildcats' state run ends with loss to McPherson in quarterfinals



Louisburg senior Grant Ryals tries to dribble past two McPherson players during the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal match last Tuesday in Louisburg. The Wildcats saw their season come to an end with a 2-1 loss to McPherson.

As the final buzzer sounded in Louisburg's loss to McPherson in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals last Tuesday, it marked the end of race the Wildcats weren't ready to stop running.

They wanted to keep running all the way to the state semifinals for the second straight season and hoped to bring home a state plaque. The Wildcats almost accomplished that as they put the pressure on McPherson throughout much of the second half, but couldn't convert in the 2-1 defeat that ended their season with a 13-6 record at Wildcat Sports Complex.

It was a second half the Wildcats won, except for a call that ended up being the difference in the contest.

Senior goalie Ambrose Stefan came out to save the ball, but was given a yellow card after the referee said he made contact with a McPherson player. The Bullpups put the penalty kick in the back of the net with 32 minutes left in the match and the Wildcats didn't have an answer.

“The kids showed up and played despite the loss,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We maintained the pressure, had the greater edge in possession and we did a good job of finding feet and playing our game. We had a couple chances, and I don’t know what happened to give them the penalty kick – it’s just the way it goes I guess. I don’t agree with it, and it is unfortunate, but that didn’t lose us the game.”

The Wildcats came out with a sense of urgency in the second half after they found themselves down 1-0 at halftime. It could have been a bigger deficit, but the Louisburg defense came through as Stefan knocked away several shots in front of the goal, and McPherson had a good look at an empty net, but defender Eli Minster headed the ball away to keep it a one score game.

Conley wanted his team to play with a sense of urgency in the second half and the Wildcats did that as they were able to control the possession and put pressure on the Bullpup defense.

“We needed to play with more energy, play harder and go win a 50-50 ball,” he said. “I didn’t want them to have any regrets and to put it all out there. I just wanted them to play with a little more passion, and a little more heart and I think the second half we showed that. We showed how good of a team we could be, how good we are and we just couldn’t get one to go in.”

Louisburg came out of halftime inspired and tied the match three minutes into the second half. Senior Raistlin Brewer was able to get the ball across the line in a scrum in front of the goal to give the Wildcats their first score of the match.



Raistlin Brewer tries to beat a couple McPherson players to a 50-50 ball Tuesday.

McPherson scored on the penalty kick five minutes later, but the Wildcats stayed on the attack

Senior Grant Ryals had a good look at the goal with eight minutes left in the game, but his shot was saved. Fellow senior Christian Scholtz had a header opportunity in the box that nearly went in, but it bounced off the crossbar.

Sophomore Ryan Haight had a shot on goal with four minutes remaining that went off the crossbar as well. At that point, Conley took out a defender and brought in junior Chris Williams to join fellow forward Brock Bila up top to try and get more scoring chances, but the Wildcats weren't able to find the back of the net.

"We could have stayed with what we had and still got plenty of

looks,” Conley said. “We just wanted two guys a little bit higher so we could be more aggressive. I didn’t think we could do it the whole game because if left such huge channels for them to run on and that is all they wanted to do. Unfortunately we just couldn’t get one to go in and McPherson was just holding on for dear life in the last 30 minutes.

“We kept grinding and had great opportunities. We hit the crossbar twice, we just couldn’t quite get it there. McPherson is a good team, and I think everyone anticipated a great game and that is what it ended up being. Coming out on the bottom end of it stinks really bad, but I think the kids played their butts off and they left it all out there and did everything we could.”



Goalie Ambrose Stefan gets a hug from coach Kyle Conley following the Wildcats' 2-1 loss to McPherson.

The loss ended what was a successful season for the Wildcats as they finished with their first Frontier League championship since 2010 and third consecutive regional title. Conley was happy with what his team was able to accomplish.

“We got 10 wins in the regular season, not many teams do that,” he said. “We won a league title, not many teams can say they did that. Winning a regional championship, not many teams can say they did that either. We came through, played really hard, but unfortunately we came out on the losing end. I am proud of these guys and what we were able to achieve. “

Louisburg soccer ready for battle with McPherson



Louisburg junior Brock Bila is one of several Wildcats who hope to find success against McPherson tonight in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal game in Louisburg.

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team has found itself in a familiar spot.

For the second straight season, the Wildcats will have a chance to qualify for the state semifinals on their home field at Wildcat Sports Complex.

Last season, Louisburg won a wild overtime contest against Wichita-Trinity and the Wildcats hope for the same result this time around. Louisburg (13-5) will host McPherson (13-5) at 5 p.m., today as the Wildcats will try and make their second trip to the state semifinals.

"I still have a lot of nerves," Louisburg senior Grant Ryals said. "We have a lot of seniors on this team and we know we want to make it out to state again. We are pumped, but we are still a little nervous too. We watched film all day (Monday) to see how we can attack them."

Following the Wildcats' 1-0 overtime victory over Independence in the regional championship game Thursday, they were still riding high into the weekend, especially after they found out late Friday night they would be hosting the state quarterfinals.

Due to the fact both Louisburg and McPherson had the same records, the Kansas State High School Activities Association performed a coin flip to determine who would host, and Louisburg coach Kyle Conley received a call later informing him of the result.

"I am not sure how it all worked, I was just super excited that we didn't have to get on a bus for three hours one way," Conley said. "The boys will truly get one last home game. If we show up, we have a chance to play another game at state and I think that is motivation enough. We will be sleeping in our own bed, eating our same pregame meal and don't have to worry about traveling. That is definitely a benefit for us."

Louisburg will face a McPherson team that plays mainly on a turf surface and the Wildcats hope to use that as an advantage against an aggressive Bullpup team.

"Anytime you change your surroundings, the environment, or conditions, I think it is an advantage for the team that has those things," Conley said. "McPherson is a turf team and they

are going to be playing on grass and they are going to have to be on a bus for three hours and that helps us.”

However, the one thing that has caught Conley’s attention is McPherson’s style of play as the Bullpups will look to pressure the Louisburg back line.

“They are going to be the most pressuring team offensively that we have seen all year and we have seen some good teams too,” Conley said. “The way they push, and the way they get their backs in the attack, they are going to pressure more than any team we saw this year or last year. Wichita Trinity might be the closest example to them. They are a mixture of Baldwin, Spring Hill and Tonganoxie with how they play. They just push, push, push and they are a really good team and are well-coached.”



Team captain Scott Murphy and the rest of the Wildcat defense hopes to keep the McPherson attack at bay

tonight.

With that, the Wildcat back four of Kris Light, Scott Murphy, Will Frank and Eli Minster, along with midfielder Ryan Haight, will have to be alert to keep McPherson off the scoreboard.

"They are turf team and they like to play a lot of through balls, so we are going to have to watch that," Light said. "They are good team, obviously. We just have to work it around outside and want it more than them. Communication will be key for us and just outworking them in the back."

Although McPherson's style might be unique to what the Wildcats have seen in recent years, they also realize the Bullpups will have to prepare for them and what they bring to the table.

"We just have to be ready," Conley said. "Half of it is they have to defend against our style too. Quite honest, I think our styles are so conflicting and it will be interesting to see whose style wins out. We want to attack the flanks, they want to hit the overlap and go down the middle and try to play the second ball through. We do that too, be we have a little different shape. It should be a really good match."

If the Wildcats advance, they will compete in the Class 4-1A state semifinals on Friday and Saturday in Olathe. Still, they know they have a big challenge ahead of them in order to get there.

"We definitely enjoyed it Thursday and winning another regional title," Ryals said. "We know that coming back Monday, it is a new week and we have more competition ahead of us. We know what we have to do. If we just play our game, we have a chance to play out state again."

Ryals' penalty kick lifts Wildcats to regional title



Louisburg senior Kris Light hoists the regional championship trophy following the Wildcats' 1-0 win over Independence on Thursday in the Class 4-1A regional championship game in Louisburg.

Grant Ryals had already gotten his mom, Janelle, flowers for her birthday prior to Thursday's Class 4-1A regional championship game in Louisburg.

As it turned out, Ryals gave his mother – and the rest of the Louisburg soccer team – a present no one is going to forget.

In a scoreless match in overtime, Ryals converted a penalty kick to give Louisburg a 1-0 victory over Independence. The win gave the Wildcats their third consecutive regional title and the seventh in the program's history.

Following the team celebration that found Ryals on the bottom of a dog pile, he ran to his mother after he gave her one of the more memorable presents a parent could want.

"First thing I did was give her the biggest hug," Grant said. "I bought her flowers earlier and I was hoping that we would

win and it would be that much better. Then for me to score the game-winner was just perfect.”

That perfect feeling spread to the rest of the Wildcat team as they celebrated their opportunity to play at least one more game as they are one of the state’s final eight teams.

“It was our goal,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We talked about getting 10 wins, we talked about being league champs and we talked about winning a regional championship. If we work hard, do our job, then those things happen. We almost left it here with our inability to finish the ball, but the kids worked hard and it’s fantastic.

“It is so awesome when the community comes and joins us. These boys play so much for these people and love them so much – not just their family – but everybody. It is really cool be able to host this and do our job at the beginning of the season to be able to do this.”



Grant Ryals points to the stands after he scored the game-winning goal in overtime Thursday.

Louisburg's job is not done, however, as the Wildcats will host the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal game for the second consecutive season. They will play McPherson at 5 p.m. on Tuesday at Wildcat Sports Complex.

As exciting as the Wildcats' regional championship was, Louisburg had an opportunity to put some distance between itself and Independence several different times throughout the contest.

The Wildcats (13-5) took 24 shots against an Independence defense that had eight or nine players behind the ball at all times. Despite Independence's tactic of trying to pack it in, Louisburg still had many good looks, but couldn't convert.

Brock Bila, Jarod Rose, Landon Johnson, Christian Scholtz,

Eric Vazquez, Raistlin Brewer and Chris Williams all had shots on goal, but they either just went wide of the target, sailed above the cross bar, or was saved.

Frustration was starting to mount at times as the Wildcats desperately wanted to get a score in regulation.

"You start pressing and they were trying to do a little bit too much," Conley said of his team. "They struggled to get into the flow a little bit and Independence was another team that put a ton of kids behind the ball. They were basically looking to get a tie. Every now and then they would counter, but they just packed it in. They did a good job of not getting us good looks, but when we did, we weren't able to finish it.

"Independence started believing a little bit and got the momentum. However, our kids were mentally tough and fought through all that. They didn't quit and that is a credit to them."

The Wildcats thought they had broken through earlier in the contest as Ryals found the back of the net on a direct kick from 20 yards away less than 10 minutes into the second half. However, after the celebration, the Wildcats were called for offsides and impeding the view of the goalie, and the goal was disallowed.



Senior Raistlin Brewer heads the ball away Thursday against Independence.

That left for even more angst on the Wildcat sidelines.

“It all worked out in the end, but it was extremely frustrating at the time,” Conley said. “We went from a high to a low when we found out it didn’t count and had a little ‘Woe is me’ moment. Then we picked it back up and started taking care of things.”

Louisburg’s defense, which hasn’t allowed a goal so far in the postseason, tightened up when Independence tried to attack. Kris Light, Scott Murphy, Will Frank and Eli Minster fortified the Wildcat back line, while goalie Ambrose Stefan secured his third consecutive shutout.

Independence’s best chance came early in the overtime as the Bulldogs sent a corner kick into the box that bounced around

before Brewer cleared the ball away and prevented the game-winner.

With four minutes left in the overtime, Johnson put pressure on the Bulldog defense as he dribbled the ball into the box and was taken down by an Independence defender. The Wildcats were awarded the penalty kick and Conley chose Ryals to take it.

"I have been a part of stranger things," Conley said. "We talked earlier this week that Independence beat Baldwin 1-0 on only one shot, which was a penalty kick. The way they were packing it in, I was praying he was going to put it in. I couldn't look at first, but then I had to."

Ryals left no doubt as he pounded the shot past the diving Independence goalie and the celebration began as his goal put the Wildcats into the state quarterfinals.



The Louisburg soccer team poses for a picture following the Wildcats regional championship victory over Independence. It was the seventh regional title in program history.

“The day before at practice, we probably took PK’s for like 30-45 minutes” Ryals said. “I just kind of had a feeling that this game might come down to it. I didn’t miss any in practice and I have only missed one all season. I just did what I usually do. He guessed the right way, but I just beat him with too much power.”

Now, the Wildcats will try for their second straight trip to the state semifinals and a win over McPherson would seal that.

“You want to play as long as you can,” Conley said. “You win a regional championship and then anything can happen. You make the Elite 8 and it is really fun and you take great pride in it. I couldn’t be more proud of how hard we played. We kept grinding and that is a good thing and proud of them for not giving up.”

Make sure to [click here](#) for more photos from Louisburg’s regional championship victory.