

Knipp signs with Ottawa University-Arizona for soccer



Louisburg High School senior Herman Knipp signed his letter of intent on March 10 to play soccer for Ottawa University-Arizona, a new school that is opening in Surprise, Ariz. Sitting next to him are his parents Herman and Susan Knipp. Standing (from left) is Louisburg soccer assistant Michael Pickman and head coach Kyle Conley.

Once his high school season ended in early November, Herman Knipp thought he was done with soccer.

The Louisburg High School senior was ready to focus on getting a degree in engineering, but then he got a message from an old club coach and everything changed. He presented Knipp with an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

His former U12 coach, Matt Gow, was recently named as the head coach for Ottawa University-Arizona, a brand new college based in Surprise, Ariz. Gow offered him a spot and Knipp accepted a chance to play for his former coach.

Knipp made it official on March 10 when he signed his letter of intent to play for Ottawa and he is ready for a chance to make his mark with a new program.

"It is incredible," Knipp said. "You don't really get the chance to start something at the collegiate level. A chance

like that just doesn't come because all these programs and colleges have been established for so long. I am excited about it. Obviously it is going to be a little rough the first couple of years because we are starting from scratch, but I am looking forward to it."

The new campus will be located across the street from where the Kansas City Royals have spring training and the Ottawa school will feature 19 athletic teams as it looks to grow in the coming years.



Knipp is excited to be a part of it and earn his engineering degree at the same time.

"Ottawa changed the schedule around to make it easier on the athletes," Knipp said. "I found a way to make athletics and

academics combine into one and just having the opportunity to play in college and it is not one many people get. I can't take this for granted and can't wait to move to Arizona."

Being a part of a first-year program intrigued Knipp, and despite being a long way from home, he is looking forward to joining the Spirit team. The coaches have mentioned to Knipp about possibly playing the forward position – the same one he played in high school – or he could play in the midfield.

Knipp earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors in his senior season after he scored 10 goals and recorded three assists as he helped the Wildcats to a fourth-place state finish in Class 4-1A – the best finish in school history.

"He has every one on a blank slate because we are all technically freshman to him. Honestly, I want to start if that is possible, but I am just going to give everything I have and do my best when I get down there. Everyone is fighting for those 11 spots."

Along with trying to find his way with a new team and school, Knipp will have to adjust to a new community – one that is several hours away from home.

"It is going to be tough," Knipp said. "I can't be like, 'Hey mom, can I come home for dinner tonight?' It is an 18-hour drive straight-through. It will be a major life change that is for sure, but I am excited for it."

Top 10 stories of 2016



Here are the Louisburg Sports Zone Top 10 Stories of the Year. In each brief explanation of the story, there will be a link to the full story of when the event actually happened. Thanks again for a successful 2016 and I am already looking forward to 2017.

10. LHS golf qualifies three for the state tournament



Hogan Welch (left), Ty Martin (middle) and T.J. Svoboda all earned a spot in the Class 4A state golf tournament in May.

Three Louisburg High School golfers put together a strong performance in less-than-ideal weather conditions during the Class 4A regional tournament in May.

Hogan Welch, T.J. Svoboda and Ty Martin all three earned qualifying scores to earn a spot in the Class 4A state tournament in the rain at Dub's Dread Golf Course. At the state tournament, Welch led the way as he shot an 84 to finish

34th overall in his second consecutive state tournament.

9. Tappan, Conklin win state debate crown



Carson Tappan (left) and Curran Conklin (right) pose for a picture with their state championship debate trophy with coach Brian Weilert.

After 11 rounds and 17 hours of debate over two days, Carson Tappan and Curran Conklin didn't have a lot more left to give.

But all that hard work paid off for the Louisburg High School duo.

During the Class 4A 2-speaker state debate tournament at Independence High School, Tappan and Conklin were awarded

their first state championship after finishing with an 11-0 record.

They weren't the only Louisburg team to come home with some hardware.

Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson found themselves among the final four teams as well. Despite a close split-decision loss in the semifinals, Holtzen and Anderson finished third to win their first state trophy.

8. Three Wildcats win regional track titles, qualify 11 events for state



Chloe Renner (left), T.J. Dover (middle) and Isabelle Holtzen won regional titles in their respective events in May at the regional meet in Chanute.

Louisburg High School students Isabelle Holtzen, Chloe Renner and T.J. Dover were among several members of the Wildcat track teams to have big performances at the Class 4A regional meet in May at Chanute High School.

Holtzen won a regional crown in the pole vault, while Renner won the triple jump to lead the Lady Cats as they qualified for six events total. Louisburg sent all three relay teams

that consisted of Kaitlyn Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Megan Lemke, Reilly Alexander, Jordon Leach, Hanna Becker, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham, Liz Hildreth and Holtzen. Sophie McMullen also earned a spot in the discus.

Dover captured a regional crown in the discus as he recorded a personal best throw of more than 150 feet. He was one of five events to go to the state meet. Teammate Jarod Woodward also qualified in the shot put, while Chris Williams did the same in the 400 dash.

Brandon Cooper, Quinn Rigney, Ben Minster, along with Williams, helped the 4×100 relay team earn a spot, while Wyatt Reece, Ben Hupp, Tanner Belcher and Michael Minster also qualified in the 4×800 relay.

7. FFA wins three state titles, shines at national competition



Members of the LHS FFA chapter won three state titles in May and later traveled to nationals in October and brought home several honors.

After three Louisburg High School FFA teams won state titles in their respective career development events in May at the state competition, those same students performed well at the nationals.

Louisburg sent three teams to the 89th Annual National FFA Convention in Indianapolis and all three were among the top in their respective Career Development Events (CDE). Each team received a gold emblem, while 11 of the 12 members who attended received individual gold emblems as well.

Paige Buffington, Wyatt Reece, Georgia Wilde, Justin Sievert, Hattie Harris, Hallie Hutsell, Faith Seuferling, Mariah Wrigley, Madelynn Yalowitz, Bryn O'Meara, Morgan Strumillo and Lexie Reece all came away with honors from nationals.

6. Cross country sends three to state, Moore captures medal



Freshman Trinity Moore became the first female runner in Louisburg history to capture a state cross country medal.

Louisburg High School freshman Trinity Moore didn't look like a first-year varsity runner at the Class 4A state cross country meet as she finished 19th overall with a time of 20 minutes and 54 seconds – just 10 seconds off her personal best time. That finish was good enough to earn a state medal and became the first female runner in Louisburg history to do so.

Moore joined juniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith as all three runners competed in the state meet in Wamego in October. Reece and Smith finished 48th and 68th, respectively, just a week after finishing in the top five at the regional meet.

5. Koechner, Keegan earn medals as Wildcat wrestling puts five to state



Louisburg's Mason Koechner was one of two medalists for the Wildcats at the Class 4A state wrestling tournament in February. Koechner finished third at 220 pounds and teammate Nathan Keegan was sixth at 120 pounds.

For the first time since 2011, a member of the Louisburg High School wrestling team left the Class 4A state tournament with a medal – in fact – two of them did.

Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan finished in the top six of their respective weight classes at state meet in Salina.

Koechner took third overall at 220 pounds, while Keegan came in sixth at 120 pounds.

Along with the two state medalists, the Wildcats also sent three other wrestlers to state. Anders Vance (285 pounds), Thad Hendrix (113) and Hunter Bindi (106) competed for Louisburg as it qualified five for state for the second consecutive season.

4. Griffin signs with New Orleans Saints



Photo courtesy of the New Orleans Saints
Louisburg native, and Air Force Academy graduate, Garrett
Griffin, was signed to the New Orleans Saints practice squad
in August.

In early June, Garrett Griffin received his diploma from the Air Force Academy and shook hands with the President of the United States.

That event alone is enough to top most people's list of

accomplishments. Four days later, Griffin fulfilled a life-long dream.

Following his graduation from the Air Force, Griffin was signed by the New Orleans Saints and his dream of playing professional football became a reality. The Louisburg native competed in the Saints training camp and later earned a spot on the team's practice squad, where he currently resides.

3. Wildcat football rallies around coach, ends playoff drought



The Louisburg High School football team celebrates its regional championship and its first playoff win in four years.

The season didn't get off to the start members of the Louisburg High School football team were hoping for. The Wildcats dealt with the departure of head coach Kyle Littrell before the season, but instead of letting it define their season, it made them stronger.

Louisburg rallied behind its former coach and the Wildcats won their first playoff game in four years after they defeated Independence in November to win a regional title. The Wildcats lost to eventual state champion Bishop Miege in the sectional round of the playoffs and ended their season with an 8-3 record.

2. Girls soccer team wins regional crown during inaugural season



The Louisburg girls soccer team celebrates its regional championship in the Wildcats' inaugural season.

As the final buzzer sounded, members of the Louisburg girls soccer team rushed to each other in the middle of the field at the Wildcat Sports Complex. It was a sense of euphoria.

The Wildcats had every reason to be excited.

Louisburg – a program that has been in existence for all of two months – won its first regional title in program history in May after it ousted Basehor-Linwood in a 3-1 victory during the regional championship game. The win put the Wildcats in the state quarterfinals, where their season came to an end with 3-1 loss to De Soto and finished up with a 14-4-1 record on season.

1. Boys soccer advances to state final four



The Louisburg High School boys soccer team made history this past season as the Wildcats earned their first state quarterfinal victory and a spot in the Class 4A final four.

The state quarterfinal round had been nothing but heartbreak

for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

In their previous six appearances, the Wildcats have seen their season come to an end and those players were left only to dream what playing in the state final four would be like.

There was no imagining this time around.

Louisburg got a goal in the 75th minute from senior Herman Knipp to give the Wildcats a 1-0 victory over Trinity Academy in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg. The Wildcats moved on to the Class 4A state final four in Topeka in November, where they took fourth – the best finish in program history.

The Wildcats (14-6-2) finished their season with losses to eventual state champion Bishop Miege and Andover Central, but doubled their number of wins from the prior year.

Six Wildcats named to all-state soccer team



Louisburg senior defender Jacob Benne (left) and senior midfielder Noah Juarez were named to the Class 4-A all-state first team by the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association last week. In all, the Wildcats put six players on the team.

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team is coming off possibly the best season in program history and the awards continue to stream in for several Wildcats

Six Louisburg players were selected to the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association Class 4-1A all-state team last week, including two first-team selections, three second-team honors and an honorable mention.

Senior midfielder Noah Juarez and senior defender Jacob Benne were selected to the first team as both players led the Wildcats in their respective positions. Junior midfielder Grant Ryals, senior defender Curran Conklin and junior defender Kris Light earned second-team honors, while junior goalie Ambrose Stefan was named as an honorable mention.

“This was fantastic to see so many of the boys receive this honor,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “I could not be more pleased for them. This is an incredible honor and the boys earned it. None of these accolades could not be possible without their teammates. This was just the icing on the cake for these young men. It was an incredible season and one that will be difficult to duplicate.”



(From left) Junior Grant Ryals, senior Curran Conklin and junior Kris Light were named to the Class 4-1A all-state second team and junior goalie Ambrose Stefan earned

honorable mention honors.

Juarez was among the top scorers in the Frontier League as he finished the season with 18 goals and seven assists to lead the Wildcats. Benne, along with Conklin, was key to the Wildcat defense from outside back spot as both players kept opposing offenses from getting good looks at the goal.

Ryals played a defensive midfielder spot for the Wildcats, but still finished the season with five goals and had four assists. Light was also a big part of the Louisburg defense as he helped turn away shots from the middle of the field.

Stefan kept the Wildcats in several games as he finished the year with 62 saves and had nine shutouts in 21 games. He gave up an average of 1.09 goals a game as he helped the Wildcats to a 14-6-1 record on the season.

These are just the latest honors for the Wildcats. Last month, Louisburg earned eight all-Frontier League selections, which was the most of any league school.

The Wildcats ended their season in the Class 4-1A state tournament for the first time in program history and finished fourth overall.

Eight Wildcats selected to all-league soccer team



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez (left) and junior Grant Ryals were both named to the all-Frontier League first team recently as they were two of eight Wildcats selected to the squad when the list was released last week.

Fresh off a run to its first state semifinal appearance in program history, the Louisburg High School boys soccer team is starting to reap rewards from what was a successful season.

The Wildcats finished near the top of the Frontier League standings this year after winning only four games in the regular season a year ago. That turnaround caught the eye of the rest of their opponents and the league coaches rewarded them for it.

Louisburg earned eight spots on the all-Frontier League team that was released last week following the Wildcats' run in the state tournament that left them with a fourth place finish in Class 4-1A.

The Wildcats had the most all-league selections in the Frontier League and league champion Spring Hill was second with seven.

Midfielders Noah Juarez and Grant Ryals garnered first team honors, while defenders Jacob Benne, Kristopher Light and goalie Ambrose Stefan were named to the second team. Forward Herman Knipp, midfielder Landon Johnson and defender Curran Conklin were selected as honorable mentions.

"It was extremely gratifying to see this," Louisburg coach

Kyle Conley said. "This was kind of icing on the cake for the boys. They all worked so hard and to be acknowledged by the other league coaches was impressive. The boys did a lot of great things this year and it was really nice to get the credit they so deserved."

Juarez was one of the top scorers in the Frontier League as he finished the season with 18 goals and seven assists and filled up the stat sheet on a lot nights. Ryals was the opposite of Juarez as he had five goals and four assists on the season, but was invaluable to what the Wildcats were trying to accomplish.

"Noah had his best season statistically in his career," Conley said. "He fit the system I put in place perfectly and he excelled at attacking midfielder. He has had a great attitude and was a leader for us this year."

"Grant played defensive midfielder for us and did a lot of the ugly jobs. At defensive midfielder your stats aren't always going to standout, but he did the dirty jobs. He had a great work ethic and provided a lot of structure for our team. He was also one who did a great job starting our possession."



Junior Kristopher Light (left), junior Ambrose Stefan (center) and senior Jacob Benne were named to the all-league second team.

Louisburg's defense was a big part of the Wildcats' success this season and many of them were rewarded for their efforts. Benne and Conklin turned away several opportunities from the outside back spot, while Light cleaned up the middle of the field. In goal, Stefan provided the Wildcats with many big saves on the season.

"It was great to see the progress that Jacob, Curran, Ambrose and Kris made this year and their focus to improve," Conley said. "I was extremely pleased with how much they improved and the leadership they provided to our team. They had great and positive attitudes and were a major asset to our success. The defense did a great job holding our team together and keeping us in the game. They exceeded our expectations and were excellent in the back for us. It was really nice that the league took notice."



Senior Curran Conklin (left), freshman Landon Johnson (center) and senior Herman Knipp were named as all-league honorable mentions.

Knipp, a senior, was second on the Wildcat team with 10 goals to go along with three assists on the year from the forward position to earn the honorable mention honor. As a freshman, Johnson also made a big impression on the coaches with four goals and two assists at the midfield spot.

Knipp scored the game's lone goal in the Wildcats' 1-0 state quarterfinal win over Trinity Academy, while Johnson also had a goal that tied eventual league champion Spring Hill late in the regular season.

"With as talented as our league is offensively, it was fantastic to see them acknowledge Herman and Landon," Conley said. "They both had really good years and scored some big goals for us. I think Herman's goal could be the most important goal in the history of our program. Landon's goal against Spring Hill could also be one of the top five of our program's history as well. Both kids were talented and excelled in their own ways.

"I could not be happier for this group. These individual awards could not be possible without their teammates. I feel that our team finishing fourth in state just proves this. It was a fantastic season and I could not be happier for a group of young men."

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE SOCCER

FIRST TEAM

Noah Juarez, Louisburg, senior

Lucas Moore, Spring Hill, senior

Keegan Finch, Ottawa, senior

Ethan Rodriguez, De Soto, junior

Grant Ryals, Louisburg, junior

Daniel Hidalgo, Spring Hill, senior

Lorenzo Noguiera, Spring Hill, senior

Andrew Dowdy, De Soto, senior

Carson Brier, De Soto, sophomore

Blayne Chapman, Baldwin, junior

GOALIE – Killian Beck, Spring Hill, senior

SECOND TEAM

Ellis Baughan, Baldwin, senior

Sam Campbell, Eudora, senior

Daniel Apple, De Soto, sophomore

Andrew Soph, Ottawa, senior

Ryan Wokutch, Paola, freshman

Jacob Benne, Louisburg, senior

Bryce Towles, Spring Hill, junior

Kristopher Light, Louisburg, junior

Keenan Powell, Spring Hill, senior

Noah Buckley, Baldwin, senior

GOALIE – Ambrose Stefan, Louisburg, junior

HONORABLE MENTION

Caleb Othick, Spring Hill, senior

Curran Conklin, Louisburg, senior

Jon Bock, Eudora, junior

Dylan Jamison, Baldwin, sophomore

Andrew Goodman, De Soto, junior

Zane Muhl, Ottawa, senior

Herman Knipp, Louisburg, senior

Byron Fangman, Ottawa, senior

Landon Johnson, Louisburg, freshman

GOALIE – Bret Folks, Eudora, senior

Wildcats finish fourth at state tournament



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez (10) jumps into the air to win a header Saturday during the third-place game of the Kansas Class 4-1A State Soccer Championships at Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

TOPEKA – It had already made program history, but the Louisburg High School boys soccer team wanted more – much more.

The Wildcats had their eyes set on a state championship last weekend after they qualified for the Kansas Class 4-1A State

Soccer Championships for the first time. At the very least, Louisburg wanted to finish in the top three and bring home a trophy to be displayed in the school for years to come.

Those hopes were dashed as Louisburg suffered a pair of losses, including a 5-0 defeat Friday in the semifinals to the eventual state champion, Bishop Miege. A little more than 12 hours later, Louisburg faced off with Andover Central in the third place match, but came up short in a 2-0 loss Saturday at the Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

Louisburg (14-6-2) may have seen its season end with two losses, but the Wildcats made a big jump from the previous season as it won twice as many games as the year before and captured its first-ever state quarterfinal victory.

"Coming off the season they came off of, we knew that we were going to have a lot of work to do.," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "We knew for any of this to happen, it would just be unbelievable and would be the greatest thing ever. Now that our expectations are so high, we are super disappointed because we didn't play well. It is so frustrating because the boys did so well and came so far. It stinks, but at the same time when you look back it is an unbelievable journey and unbelievable ride. It is a fantastic experience with a great group of young men."

The Wildcats were hoping to salvage the state tournament with a win over Andover Central for third place, but Louisburg was forced to play from behind for almost the entire match.

Andover Central's Jacob Meeker put the Jaguars on top less than two minutes into the match and Andover's Jayden Vossen added another goal with 20 minutes left in the first half.

"We were just trying to get settled," Conley said of the first goal. "We gave up maybe two goals like that all year and one of the best players in the state gets a great run and we can't get a body on him. Then for the rest of the game I think we

were on our heels. It is unfortunate. I was just thinking if we could weather the storm for the first 10 minutes, get our feet under us because we are all fired up, but two minutes and then boom.



Defender Jacob Benne clears the ball away near the goal Saturday.

Louisburg did have its chances, especially in the first half, as senior Jacob Benne ripped a shot off a deflected corner kick from 25 yards away that was saved.

Seniors Noah Juarez, Herman Knipp, along with juniors Scott Murphy, Raistlin Brewer and Grant Ryals, all had opportunities, but their shots were either just wide or found the hands of the Andover goalie.

The opportunities were not quite as prevalent in the second half as the Andover defense kept a lot of people back and limited the Wildcats' shots on goal.

"Andover Central is a team that bunkers in and once they get a lead they are going to sit in," Conley said. "We kept getting chance after chance, we just could not get one to go in. If we would have, we would've instantly had the momentum because just needed that one little jolt. That would have got the crowd going and they would have felt that energy a little bit. Unfortunately, their keeper made some big saves and it is what it is. It is disappointing, but it has been a great run and we should be holding our heads up."



Senior Ty Martin tries to dribble past an Andover Central defender Saturday during the third-place game in Topeka.

Bishop Miego also scored quickly on the Wildcats as it scored a goal in the opening minutes of the semifinal game and dominated possession. Louisburg was able to keep it a one score game for much of the first half, but the Stags scored right before halftime to make it a 2-0 deficit for the Wildcats.

The Stags scored three more goals in the second half, including one on a penalty kick. Miego went on to play for the state championship and beat Basehor-Linwood 1-0 in overtime.

In the first half we gave up a quick goal again and it was just nerves playing in this atmosphere," Conley said. "Miego came at us hard and we were extremely nervous. We gave up a soft goal right before half and we were on our heels a little bit. It was good experience for everyone because we were able get a lot of kids in so everyone got to get in the game and play against the eventual state champion."

Despite the two losses, the Wildcats realize it was a good season that brought several good memories. Still it was bittersweet for Wildcat seniors Noah Juarez, Jacob Benne, Ty Martin, Calvin Cassida, Curran Conklin, Kolten Ragan and Herman Knipp as they played their final game in a Louisburg uniform.

"These boys had an up and down career," Conley said. "They have faced a lot of adversity, but they turned it around at the end of last year and had a great run. They won a regional championship and lost to the eventual state champion in Rose Hill and it was a fantastic shot of confidence for them because then they could believe in themselves. Then I tried to get them to buy into a system and believe in what I can see out of them and what they can do, and then see them become that was unbelievable. Then to beat a team like Trinity to get here in the first place was phenomenal and doing it at home in front of a ridiculous amount of people."

“Beating Tonganoxie, De Soto, tying Spring Hill, sweeping Ottawa, going to state – things this program hasn’t done in a long time has been a lot of fun. It is a credit to their work ethic and how hard their devotion, belief and love for one another just emulated in a great journey for us.”

Louisburg soccer ready for Bishop Miege test



Louisburg’s Grant Ryals (left) and the rest of the Louisburg High School boys soccer team will go for the program’s first state title tonight when the Wildcats face off with Bishop Miege in the Class 4-1A state semifinals at 7 p.m., in Topeka.

Preparing to play two more games this late in the season has never been on the itinerary for any member of the Louisburg boys soccer team – ever.

Following the Wildcats’ first state quarterfinal victory in school history Tuesday over Trinity Academy, Louisburg is heading into uncharted territory. The Wildcats are gearing up for a chance to win the program’s first state championship this weekend when they travel to the Class 4-1A state tournament in Topeka.

Still, the images from their 1-0 win over Trinity are still fresh in the players' mind as they celebrated the program's biggest win in its 14-year existence.

"It is amazing how at the beginning of the year maybe 20 people came to our game, and now since we played in the state quarterfinals, people just packed the stadium," Louisburg junior Grant Ryals said. "Everyone is sitting on the ground, you have people standing along the fence and the line to congratulate us after the game is as long as the whole sideline – it just pretty amazing. We appreciate all the support."

Players and coaches were inundated with phone calls and texts following the game, and into the night, congratulating them on their accomplishment.

"My phone was blowing up all night Tuesday and well into the early morning from either, Facebook, Twitter, text messages or just calls from family, old teammates and fellow coaches," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "It was an unbelievable experience and I think that the boys and the program past and present truly enjoyed it. Everyone in the school and community is talking about these boys and the success they are having and rightfully so. Because of that, I felt it spilled over into Wednesday's training, but we got pretty focused throughout practice."

However, there is no more time for celebration as the Wildcats will face their biggest test of the season in the Class 4-1A state semifinals when they face off with Bishop Miege at 7 p.m. tonight at Topeka's Hummer Sports Park Complex.

Bishop Miege (16-2-1) is no stranger to the state tournament as they have won four state titles since 1998 and have been a state runner-up five times. The Stags have also won 15 regional titles in the program's history.

Their lone losses this season were a 3-2 defeat at the hands

of Blue Valley West and a double overtime loss to Blue Valley Southwest. The Stags also tied with St. Thomas Aquinas.

Louisburg (14-4-1) realizes it has a tall order in front of them if it wants to play in the championship game – maybe one of Biblical proportions.

“They are basically Goliath and I think everyone knows that,” Louisburg senior Curran Conklin said. “That is more of a challenge for us and I think we are ready to take that on.”

The Wildcats will look to lean on a defense that has posted back-to-back shutouts in the playoffs that is led by Conklin, seniors Kolten Ragan and Jacob Benne, junior Kris Light and senior goalie Ambrose Stefan.



Junior defender Kris Light heads the ball away during Tuesday's state quarterfinal match against Trinity.

It is the defense that has kept the Wildcats in several matches this season and they know they are playing some of their best soccer right now.

"Knowing our defensive line is as good as they are, it helps all of us play better because we are comfortable and we trust

each other," Ragan said. "I know Ambrose is comfortable with us and I think that helps him perform better as well. We all help each other."

Still, Conley realizes the task will be a difficult one, but it is a challenge his team is looking forward to.

"Miege is unbelievably talented team," Conley said. "They have been to countless state final fours and have won more than their fair share of state championships. "They are not just an extremely talented team, but have a fantastic coach as well. They are a team that will play very quick and as a team throughout the game. They move the ball fast and will exploit any weakness you team has.

"This could be the best team that this program has ever played. They are deep in talent and play extremely disciplined. We are clearly the underdog and that is fine with us. We have gotten zero respect for most of the season from the coaches poll in our ranking, so this is just another chance for us to prove people wrong."

Win or lose, the Wildcats are guaranteed two matches and have a chance to bring home the program's first state plaque. If Louisburg wins, they will play the winner of Basehor-Linwood and Andover Central in the championship at 2 p.m., on Saturday. Should they lose, the Wildcats will play at noon for third-place.

The top three placers at state are awarded trophies and the players hope they will be able to put a team picture in one for all to see.

"It would mean everything to me," said senior Noah Juarez of possibly bringing home a state trophy. "If we can bring back a plaque I think people would remember us for a very long time in a positive way."

Opinion: Team comes together to break barrier



The Louisburg High School boys soccer team celebrates following its state quarterfinal victory Tuesday over Trinity Academy in Louisburg.

Late in Tuesday's state quarterfinal game against Trinity Academy, Louisburg senior Herman Knipp was laying on the ground in pain.

His legs were taken out from under him by a Trinity player, who was later given a red card for the incident. He got up, walked it off and moved on.

Three minutes later, Knipp was on the top of the world – and so were the rest of the Louisburg soccer faithful. His goal in the 75th minute gave the Wildcats a 1-0 win over Trinity and their first state quarterfinal victory.

Knipp's goal not only put his team in the state semifinals, but alleviated years of pain past Wildcat players have endured with his one shot. Prior to this season, Louisburg had advanced to the state quarterfinals six times only to see its season come to an end.

Several alumni from the program were on hand to witness history under the lights Tuesday at the Wildcat Sports Complex. Some were just as excited as the players.

“It is unbelievable,” said Louisburg coach Kyle Conley, who is in his first year with the program. “All the stuff that coach (Ben) York and the previous players did prior to this year was great. There were some really good teams that came through here, but they always got stuck in this round. We are always talking about let’s take the program on our shoulders and see where we can go and do something different.

“All the pressure was on (Trinity), not us. They had been in this spot 15 of the last 16 years and the pressure is on them. This is our field and we don’t lose at home. We are undefeated here and this is what we do. I mean, how hard did these kids play? It was just awesome. I couldn’t be prouder of a group of kids.”



Louisburg head coach Kyle Conley is doused with cold water thanks to Herman Knipp and Eric Vazquez (14) following Tuesday's win.

In fact, one could even say Knipp's goal might be the most important in Wildcat soccer history –depending on your point of view. There have been many vital goals, or plays, in the last 14 years, but Knipp's might stand out more than most.

There is no one else that could say their shot put their team in the state semifinals – which speaks volumes.

At the same time, I am not saying this one goal was the lone reason for the Wildcats' success. It absolutely wasn't. This was a team effort and it started on the other end of the field.

Louisburg's defense has carried the Wildcats in the postseason as they have given up just one goal in three games. Goalie Ambrose Stefan has earned back-to-back shutouts of Field Kindley and Trinity, and he has racked up several very large saves in the process.

When teams have found cracks in the Wildcat defense, Stefan has been there to protect the net. The Wildcat back line of junior Kristopher Light, along with seniors Kolten Ragan, Curran Conklin and Jacob Benne, have provided a solid front.

It has been fun to watch them grow as many of those players didn't see significant varsity minutes last season and have come together as a unit. Benne and Conklin have made it tough on the opposition as the team's outside backs.



Senior Jacob Benne clears the ball away during Tuesday's state quarterfinal game.

"Teams go after those two and I don't get it," Conley said. "I am not sure if they aren't scouting us or what, but if you are going after our outside backs, you are not going to win that battle many times. All year, teams go after them. They might be bigger and faster than our guys, but those two keeping grinding and do their job. They keep it simple and they are fantastic."

"They are a huge anchor on the outside and that gives us a little freedom to stay compacted to take away the middle. It is a credit to them because they work so hard and do all the ugly stuff. They are coachable and they listen. Their progression from June 1 to now has been unbelievable."

The Wildcats also have a solid midfield with one of the best players in Class 4-1A in Noah Juarez. The Louisburg senior

leads the Wildcats in scoring and will no doubt make the all-league team for a fourth straight season.

Juniors Grant Ryals, Scott Murphy and Raistlin Brewer, freshman Landon Johnson and seniors Calvin Cassida and Ty Martin have all come up big from the midfield spot at one time or another this season. Sophomore Jonathan Ventre is the same way from the forward position.

Conley has brought this team together and has them believing that they have nothing to lose – which quite honestly – they don't. No one, including me, thought this group was going to be one of four teams left standing.

"We are playing with house money right now," Conley said. "We have nothing to lose and everything to gain. All those teams have everything to lose. We are just going to ride it out and see what happens."

That is what makes this story even more special. In the nine years I have covered Louisburg athletics, I have seen more talented teams take the field and watch as their season has come up short. This group, though, has overcome a lot and they are stronger for it.

These Wildcats have won the hearts of a lot of soccer fans in this town and it was evident Tuesday night following the win. I don't get goosebumps often, but it was hard not to after watching fans line up the length of the field to congratulate the team.

"The student section was great and the atmosphere was just fantastic," Conley said. "You can't ask for a better group of kids who just scream, yell and have fun. The kids feed off that and was great."

The fans joined the players in the 'Icelandic Thunder Clap' following their victory and the party was on. It lasted for several minutes as several hugs were given and countless

pictures were taken to document what was an historic night for Louisburg soccer.

A night many Wildcat fans won't soon forget.

History in the making: Wildcats move on to state semis



Louisburg senior Herman Knipp celebrates his goal that gave the Wildcats a 1-0 win over Trinity Academy in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals Tuesday in Louisburg. The Wildcats advanced to the state semifinals for the first time in program history.

The state quarterfinal round has been nothing but heartbreak for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

In their previous six appearances, the Wildcats have seen their season come to an end and those players were left only to dream what playing in the state final four would be like.

There will be no imagining this time around.

Louisburg got a goal in the 75th minute from senior Herman

Knipp to give the Wildcats a 1-0 victory over Trinity Academy on Tuesday in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg. The curse of the state quarterfinal round was finally lifted.

“It is exhilarating,” Knipp said. “It is a feeling that you can’t get anywhere else. It was amazing. This is opportunity that no one else has had. I just want to make the best out of going to state because we are the first to do it from Louisburg. To see all the people and alumni from Louisburg who had smiles on their faces, it is just indescribable.”

It was a quarterfinal game that featured its fair share of drama, but none more than in the final eight minutes – and Knipp was right in the middle of it all.

The Louisburg forward was taken out from behind, near midfield with eight minutes left in the second half. The referee awarded the Trinity player a red card and the Knights were forced to play a man down the rest of the match.

Three minutes later, the mistake came back to haunt the Knights. A Trinity defender had possession at the top of the box, but Knipp sprinted from the sideline to put pressure on the play.

Knipp knocked the ball away from the defender the ball flipped into the air in the box and Knipp had a one-on-one with the goalie and put the shot away.

“They had to put a forward back in their defense and I don’t think he really knew what he was doing,” Knipp said. “He just held the ball for too long. I knew if I could put pressure on him I could get the ball and that is what really caused the goal was the pressure.”



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez slides into keep the ball away from three Trinity players Tuesday in Louisburg.

The goal sent the Louisburg sideline and fans into a frenzy as it was five minutes away from reaching its first state semifinal game.

“We were looking to counter the whole time,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We knew they were going to push hard and play that big ball. We just wanted to play our feet and try and counter and go at them. We kept getting chances and were getting close. I knew we were going to get one eventually.

“Trinity wasn’t tracking back near as much in the second half. I am not sure if they were fatigued or not, but we had way more run of play. Then the red card was just icing on the cake.”

However, had it not been for the Wildcat defense, Knipp’s goal

wouldn't have mattered as much. Trinity put pressure on the Louisburg back line early and often in the first half.

Trinity had four shots on goal in the first 20 minutes of action and had a good look at the goal with five minutes left before halftime. Junior goalie Ambrose Stefan turned away the shot with a diving save and also had a sliding stop to knock the ball away earlier in the half.



Louisburg goalie Ambrose Stefan slides in for one of his many saves Tuesday in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg.

Stefan had another diving save early in the second half to turn away another Trinity opportunity.

"I am really excited," Stefan said. "I don't usually show my emotions, but they are showing a lot right now. They had some good shots on us, but I just saw the ball and went and saved

it.”

The Louisburg head coach certainly liked what he saw from his defense, especially from his goalie.

“The first half they had such high pressure on us,” Conley said. “The game plan going in was to bend but don’t break and hold your ground. Ambrose made three unbelievable saves. One of them was point blank and he just extended out and knocked it away. That was probably the save of the year for him.”

Louisburg’s defense tightened up its play in the second half and limited the Knights’ chances on goal. Seniors Jacob Benne and Curran Conklin shut down the Trinity attack on the outside, while junior Kris Light and senior Kolten Ragan cleaned up the middle of the field.

“Kris cleaned up a bunch of messes and all four of those guys played unbelievable,” Conley said. “The outside backs Jacob and Curran just shut it down and Kolten in the second half came up huge. We changed the formation a little bit and moved him up so he could clean up their best player. That adjustment really seemed to get us going.”

The Wildcats had more chances on goal in the second half as freshman Landon Johnson had a shot save in the opening minutes. A few moments later, Conklin sent the ball into the box for Johnson, who hit it off the side of his foot, but was robbed of a goal by a diving save from the Trinity goalie.



Wildcat senior Calvin Cassida breaks away from the Trinity defense Tuesday.

Louisburg continued to put the pressure on the Knights, which eventually led to the red card late in the second half that sent Knipp to the ground.

"I was going after him and the ball, and I came in a little late, but not a whole lot," Knipp said. "Then I was running back and he kicked my leg out from under me and the ball was way gone. Luckily the AR saw it on my side and it was red card worthy."

The Wildcats will travel to Topeka on Friday for the Class 4-1A state tournament at Hummer Sports Park and the challenges get even more difficult from here on out.

Louisburg will face off with Bishop Miege at 7 p.m. Friday and will play again on Saturday. The championship match is set for

2 p.m., and the third place game is scheduled for noon.

The Wildcats obviously hope they are playing in the former.

“Hopefully when we come back to Louisburg, we can get some T-shirts that say we are state champions,” Stefan said.

Wildcats shutout Field Kindley for regional title



The Louisburg High School boys soccer team celebrates in the huddle after being presented with the Class 4-1A regional championship trophy Wednesday in Coffeyville. The Wildcats defeated Field Kindley 2-0.

COFFEYVILLE – In a little more than 24 hours, the Louisburg High School boys soccer team played two matches – one that went into double overtime and had to board a bus for a 280-mile round trip for the other.

Players were exhausted. Their legs were weak. But when it was all over, it didn't really matter.

The Wildcats didn't feel any pain. The only thing they felt was pride.

Louisburg captured its second consecutive regional title as it defeated Field Kindley 2-0 on Wednesday in Coffeyville's Veterans Memorial Stadium just hours after defeating Baldwin in double overtime in the regional semifinal.

"To be a part of back-to-back regional titles, it is something that not a lot of people can say happened to them," senior defender Curran Conklin said. "This is something that I am going to carry with me for the rest of my life, and to me that is important."



Senior Noah Juarez (right) looks up into the stands with teammate Ty Martin after one of his two second half goals Wednesday in Coffeyville.

It is the seventh regional title in Louisburg history as it now advances to the state quarterfinals. Louisburg will host

Wichita-Trinity Academy at 5 p.m. Tuesday as it tries to make program history. In its six previous state quarterfinal appearances, the Wildcats have always ended with a loss and they hope to change it this time around.

"It is a great feeling to win a regional title again," midfielder Noah Juarez said. "It is my senior year and I definitely didn't want to stop early. I wanted to go as far as I could. Every Louisburg program has stopped at the state quarterfinal and I want to go as far as I can."

Juarez did his part to help make sure the Wildcats (13-4-1) advanced onto the next round as he scored both goals in the second half. The Louisburg senior broke open a scoreless game with a free kick opportunity from close to 30 yards out.

His shot made its way through several Field Kindley defenders and past the outstretched arms of the goalie to put the Wildcats up with 34 minutes left in the contest.

Although the Wildcats did have shots on goal, the Golden Tornado defense made it difficult as they put several guys back to prevent breakaway opportunities.

"With seven guys behind the ball all the time, it made it tough for us to score," Conley said. "Then Noah got the opportunity and we wanted him to just shoot it. So we put everyone in front of him and created a lot of traffic for the goalie to see where the ball was coming. Noah just put it on frame and the rest is history. We were just looking to get shots on goal on see what happens and that benefited us tremendously."

Seven minutes later, Juarez added more breathing room for Louisburg when he put another shot past the Field Kindley goalie to all but seal the win.

"It was a great relief," Juarez said of the first goal. "I have been struggling with shooting lately, so it was a like a

weight was lifted off shoulder a little bit. It was nice to see that go in for mine, and the team's sake."

Louisburg was also able to survive a few scares from the Field Kindley attack and the Wildcat defense of Conklin, Kris Light, Kolten Ragan and Jacob Benne, along with midfielder Scott Murphy, tightened things up in the second half and limited its scoring chances.

Field Kindley nearly scored a couple goals in the first half as throw-ins from the sideline into the box found the heads of Golden Tornado players, but the headers were either saved or were just wide of the net.

"It was just tough to get into the flow there for a while," Conley said. "It was back and forth and they would play five to seven guys behind the ball and they were just packing it in. It got really tough and made it frustrating early. We did get some good chances, we just didn't finish them.

"Defensively, we covered up tight, but they had a player who could just chuck the ball and that was dangerous for us. It went a long way and it was effective. That was their best opportunity. The second half we were more aggressive defensively and much more direct."



The LHS boys soccer team poses with its regional championship trophy following its shutout of Field Kindley. The Wildcats will play Trinity Academy on Tuesday in Louisburg in the state quarterfinals.

Now the Wildcats are preparing to reach the Class 4-1A state tournament for the first time in program history. The team standing in Louisburg's way is Trinity Academy.

Trinity (9-8-1) finished third in the state tournament last season and have won 15 regional titles since 2000. The Wildcats are hoping their home field advantage can help push them onto the next round.

"We are extremely excited to have the opportunity to host," Conley said. "We will have our work cut out for us. Trinity is a very talented team that is going to be very direct and has an aggressive style of play. We need to pack the house and make it an incredible atmosphere. It is going to be an intense game."



Goalie Ambrose Stefan
clears the ball out of the
box



Senior Ty Martin tries to
dribble past a Field
Kindley player.



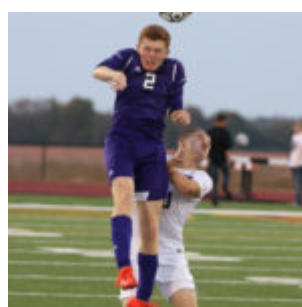
Sophomore Jonathan Ventre
heads the ball away.



Junior Raistlin Brewer
tries to change directions
on a Field Kindley
defender.



Junior Kris Light heads the
ball out of the box.



Senior Jacob Benne heads
the ball back down the
field.



Louisburg teammates (from left) Grant Ryals, Kris Light and Herman Knipp celebrate with Noah Juarez after the game's first goal.

Ryals' golden goal puts Wildcats in regional title game



Louisburg High School junior Grant Ryals celebrates his goal in the second overtime to give the Wildcats a 2-1 win over Baldwin on Tuesday in the regional semifinals in Louisburg. The Wildcats will travel to Coffeyville today for the 5 p.m. regional championship game.

Grant Ryals' face was full of grass and he had trouble breathing as his Louisburg teammates – one by one – dogpiled on him.

The thing was Ryals didn't care. In fact, he had never felt so good.

Just seconds earlier, Ryals scored the game-winning goal in double overtime as he helped the Wildcats to a 2-1 win over Baldwin on Tuesday in the Class 4A regional semifinals.

"I got a couple grass cuts on my face, but really I was just so happy that couldn't feel anything," Ryals said. "It was awesome."

Ryals took a touch just outside the box midway through the second overtime, made a defender miss and shot to the far post and found the back of the net. The Louisburg junior accounted for both goals as he helped his team advance to the regional championship game.

"I was just praying it would go in," Ryals said. "I knew I had good contact. I just aimed at the back post and I saw the goalie dive and I knew he wasn't going to get there. I just started going crazy."



Members of the Louisburg High School soccer team dogpile on teammate Grant Ryals after he scored the game-winning goal in the second overtime Tuesday in Louisburg.

The Wildcats (12-4-1) will go for their second consecutive regional title game at 5 p.m. today in Coffeyville as they face Field-Kindley High School – the same program they beat for the regional crown a year ago.

After an emotional win yesterday, Louisburg is going to have to gear up again for another tough game against No. 2 seed Field Kindley.

“We had a goal of going 9-7 this season and after we got past that our goal was to get a regional championship,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “It is regional championship or bust. That is what we are going for. The quick turnaround is unfortunate, but we can’t make any excuses. We have to suck it up and be ready to go. I know Coffeyville is going to want to get some payback for what happened last year. They will be ready and it will be a good challenge.”

The biggest challenge for the Wildcats will be playing another 80 minutes after playing 90-plus minutes against a physical Baldwin team that pressured Louisburg, especially in the second half.

Louisburg had an opportunity to put some space between itself and the Bulldogs in the first half as it had several good looks at the goal, but couldn't convert. Senior Noah Juarez had two opportunities deep in the box only to have his shots saved.

Freshman Landon Johnson, junior Scott Murphy, junior Raistlin Brewer and sophomore Jonathan Ventre also had shots on goal, but those were either saved or just wide of the mark.

Ryals was able to take advantage of one of those opportunities as he scored to give Louisburg the lead in the 26th minute. Ryals took a shot just outside the box, which ricoched off a Baldwin defender, and he gathered up for another shot and snuck it past the Baldwin goalie.

The Wildcats didn't have as many chances in the second half as Baldwin pressured the Wildcat defense. The Bulldogs tied the match with just under 10 minutes left in regulation on a shot to the far post.

"It was unbelievable because we had so many chances," Conley said. "I think we just got a little comfort in that and they came at us with a counter attack. Baldwin didn't have a ton of chances to score, but they just had a good shot."



Louisburg junior Scott Murphy tries to win a 50-50 ball against a Baldwin player Tuesday.

Despite the goal, the Louisburg defense came up with several big plays, including several from junior Kris Light who turned away several Baldwin opportunities. Defenders Curran Conklin, Jacob Benne, Kolten Ragan, midfielder Scott Murphy, along with goalie Ambrose Stefan, also played a big role.

“Kris is really playing like a stud right now,” Conley said. “He is starting to put it together and feel comfortable. He is realizing that he is pretty good at what he is doing. The outside backs next to him just held their ground. Baldwin tried to go over the top but it didn’t work very often.

“We need to cover up a little more, but we did a good job of holding them to shots from 25 yards out and Ambrose did a good

job in goal.”

All that set up Ryals’ heroics in the second overtime as he, and the rest of his teammates, made sure to celebrate a goal that kept their season alive.

“If we would have lost I would have gone home and you wouldn’t have seen me for a week,” Ryals said. “Now we won, I scored two goals for my family (team) and we are playing in the regional championship. It is pretty awesome.”

All of his teammates and fans that packed the Wildcat Sports Complex couldn’t have agreed more.