Week 1 Athlete of the Week: Layne Ryals



Here is the Louisburg Sports Zone Athlete of the Week for week one of the fall sports season, sponsored by Edward Jones-Craig Holtzen.

LAYNE RYALS, SENIOR, FOOTBALL

Louisburg senior Layne Ryals kept the Wildcat football team in the game with his leg last Friday during the team's trip to Heritage High School in Rogers, Ark. Ryals converted both of his field goal attempts from 25 and 32 yards in the team's 20-16 setback.

As the team's punter, he pinned the opposition inside the 20 on four of his six punts. Ryals also made an impact as the team's starting safety. He finished the game with nine tackles and had a fumble recovery.

The athlete of the week award is announced every Wednesday morning during the fall season and the winner is selected by Louisburg Sports Zone with the help of nominations from coaches.

Veteran group, new head coach to lead Wildcat football in 2022



Louisburg junior quarterback Declan Battle returns as the Wildcat signal caller this season after Battle recorded 20 touchdowns as a sophomore.

This isn’t just any normal season for the Louisburg football team – in fact – it is almost the exact opposite.

The Wildcats are under new leadership as Drew Harding begins his first season as the team’s head coach. It is a new voice and different way of doing things for the players.

If that wasn’t a big enough change, the schedule is another one.

Louisburg will travel outside the state to play Rogers Heritage High School in Rogers, Ark. for the season’s first game on Friday. Not only will the Wildcats be traveling, but they will playing a large 7A program in the process.

Then, in a game normally reserved for the final week of the season, Louisburg will face off with rival Paola in week two.

In what seems like a hectic beginning for many, there is a semblance of familiarity. Louisburg brings back 16 seniors to this season’s team, and several returning starters from last year.

It is that experience that Harding hopes can provide smooth sailing for a hectic first part of the season.

“I am definitely lucky coming in with 16 seniors,” Harding said. “It is really nice from a leadership standpoint. From a competitive standpoint, when you have some seniors who aren’t all on one side of the ball, you can put together a good scout team and gives us a good look. Those guys have been willing to do whatever. In practice, if they aren’t playing on defense, they are going in to help out on offense. It has been good in developing some depth on the lines.

“Most of these guys have been playing for awhile now, so hopefully that pays off for us and that game experience is something that you can’t replicate. It is really beneficial, especially early in the season.”

Offensively, they return nearly the entire side of the ball from 2021 and it all starts with junior quarterback Declan Battle.

Battle, who amassed more than 1,800 yards and 20 touchdowns last season as an honorable mention all-league player, will lead the Wildcat offense behind an experienced offensive line and backfield.

Harding is hoping his signal caller can take another step forward this season.



Senior Mason Dobbins returns to lead the Louisburg wide receivers after earning second team all-league honors last year.

“From what I have seen so far, his decision making is better and he is a lot more comfortable I would say,” Harding said. “We try to give him some simple reads where he can have one quick read and then get rid of the football. Same way in the run game. Having a year under your belt as a quarterback on Friday nights is huge. I think he is primed for a big season for us.”

Behind Battle, senior Riley Van Eaton and sophomore Ashton Moore return at running back after seeing varsity time a year ago. Junior Wyatt Holland also made the move to running back as all three will get their fair share of carries.

Senior Mason Dobbins, who earned second team all-league receiving honors a year ago, will lead the wide receiver group. Seniors Jackson Kush, Corbin Hamman, along with juniors Caden Caplinger, Brady Hickey and Hunter Heinrich, will all see time on the perimeter.



Louisburg senior Nathan Vincent returns and will play a big part on the offensive and defensive lines.

On the offensive line, the Wildcats will see a rotation of seniors Nathan Vincent, J.R. Rooney, Brayton Brueggen, Will Hutsell, Christian Golladay, junior Jaymes Melton and sophomore Conlee Hovey.

The biggest change on offense will be at the tight end spot. Senior Mack Newell made the move from soccer to football this fall and brings size to the position.

Newell, who is 6-3 and 230 pounds, will provide help in the run game and also a big target for Battle in the open field.

“That is a big addition for us,” Harding said. “There aren’t many high school football players who have the frame that he has. The ability to move and have the strength is going to help us in the run game as a blocker. He also is a big target over the middle in the pass game. There probably won’t be too many secondary guys excited to try and bring him down. The scrimmage (last Friday) was really good for him since he hasn’t played in two years and he was able to get the nerves out.”

Defensively, the Wildcats also return several starters from a year ago.

Rooney will anchor the interior of the defensive line after being named a first-team all-league player last season. He will be joined by a rotation of Brueggen, Golladay and Hutsell. From the defensive end spot, Newell, senior Isaiah Whitley, Vincent and Hovey will all see playing time there.



Senior J.R. Rooney will help anchor the defensive line after earning first team all-league honors last year.

At linebacker, Holland and Moore will lead the way along with sophomores Lucas Swartz and Brayden Yoder.

Senior Jase Hovey leads the secondary from the safety spot after being named a first-team all-league player last year and will be joined by fellow seniors Layne Ryals and Carson Wade. Battle, Heinrich, Dobbins and Hickey will all see time at the cornerback spot.

“We are fast,” Harding said of his defense. “The sideline to sideline speed is really, really good. Our linebackers are really fast, our safeties can run really well and we have a lot of team speed. Our defensive line is really athletic as well. We aren’t the biggest by any means, but I think our

speed can give teams some trouble.”

Louisburg also returns its veteran kicker as Ryals, who was a second team all-league punter and honorable mention kicker a season ago, looks to take another step forward this season.

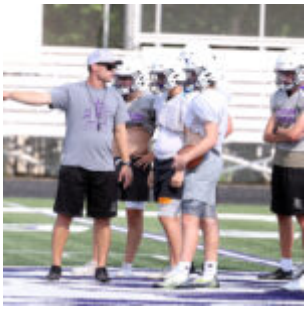
The Wildcats will certainly get a test out of the gate as they travel to face a bigger Rogers Heritage team that has struggled in recent years. Still, Harding knows it will be a challenge going up against a bigger program.

“It is definitely a different start than I was picturing when I first took over,” Harding said. “We are excited to go to Rogers and I think it will be a cool experience for us. We are playing a 7A school and it is something we are looking forward to. We are going to do some different stuff and hopefully this experience is something our kids will remember forever. There is no one in Louisburg, Kansas who said they have played a school from Arkansas.”

Louisburg is anxious to get back to the postseason after falling in the first round to the eventual state champion, St. James Academy. And despite having schools like St. James, Bishop Miege and St. Thomas Aquinas in 4A this season, Harding has high hopes for his group of players.

“Their goal every year is to win a state championship,” Harding said of his players. “We want to compete each and every game, but we can’t get there unless we get better. I know it is cliche, but we have to get better every single day. We need to come together as a team and we have a lot of potential. If we do those things, I think we have a chance to be pretty good.”

First week of practice breeds optimism for LHS fall programs



Louisburg head football coach Drew Harding speaks to his players in the huddle during a practice this week. Harding is in his first year as head coach after serving as an assistant for several years.

It’s only four days into practice, but all four Louisburg High School fall coaches have liked what they have seen so far out of their teams.

Numbers have been steady as each program has high expectations for the upcoming 2022 season.

There are also plenty of new faces this year as the Wildcats will feature two first year coaches in Bobby Bovaird (boys soccer) and Drew Harding (football). Leanna Willer (volleyball) is in her second season, while cross country coach John Reece is entering his 20th season.

On the gridiron, the Wildcat football team is returning several starters from last year’s team that lost to St. James Academy in the first round of the playoffs.

Louisburg currently has 70 players out for football this season, including 15 seniors that will help lead the way.



Senior Mason Dobbins (left) and junior Declan Battle go up for the ball during practice this week.

“Practice has been going well so far,” Harding said. “We have a lot of competition for spots and competition brings out the best in everybody. We are very excited for the upcoming season. We have a large senior class and a junior class that has gained lots of experience from last year so we are excited to see what we can do.”

Having a new head coach can bring a learning curve, but the Wildcats worked hard over the summer. Along with their annual team camp, they had several scrimmages, 7-on-7 competitions and skill sessions.

“The team did a good job picking up on our installs on both sides of the ball so we were able to get a lot of really good reps that will hopefully help us in this upcoming season,” Harding said.



Seniors Ayden Deterding (left) and Cade Gassman go through a drill in practice this week.

As for the boys soccer team, the Wildcats will try and reach the state final four for the second time in three years after falling to Bishop Miege in the regional championship match a season ago.

Louisburg returns another experienced group as it enters the season with 15 seniors after earning the No. 1 seed in the playoffs a year ago. Numbers are once again high for the program as 40 players are out this year.

“Nine of them (seniors) saw some pretty solid varsity playing time last year, and five of them got playing time in the state tournament two years ago when we finished in 3rd place,” Bovaird said. “Practice has been running very smoothly. We’re getting a great look at the players during our tryouts this week, and we’re seeing lots of leaders emerge every day.”



First-year head coach Bobby Bovaird speaks to his team during the final day of tryouts.

The Wildcats also had a busy summer with camps and team workouts. It was a good way for Bovaird to get to know his players as a first-year head coach.

“Almost everyone was able to participate,” Bovaird said. “They were getting together for informal kick-arounds, they were either lifting weights with the school’s summer program or they were lifting together on their own, and I’m loving the buy-in that they’ve shown. We’re looking at the potential to have another outstanding season this year. Of course, conditioning is a factor and we’re working on improving that during practice.

“This year, we’ve got the motto ‘United,’ which comes from the fact that many soccer clubs use that word with their club names – Manchester United, New Mexico United, etc. I chose that motto because we have kids with all sorts of experience, from those who play year-round club soccer to kids who only play in the fall. They’ve grown up playing all over the place, whether it’s a club up in the city, Louisburg Rec, or

somewhere in another district or community. But we're here right now, and we have to come together to be united as a soccer family if we want to achieve our goals. This group of seniors has had a taste of state success, and they've had a taste of falling short of the team's goals. I think they have the hunger to buy into what the coaching staff is striving to provide for them and they are willing to make a commitment to get to the top this year."



The Louisburg girls cross country team is currently ranked in the preseason top 5 in Class 4A by Kansas MileSplit.

As for cross country, Reece has liked what he has seen from his runners so far after a successful season a year ago in which both teams qualified for state.

He currently has 25 runners out this season, while 18 are out on the middle school level. The girls team is already being thought of as one of the top squads in the state as they are ranked in the top five in Class 4A by Kansas MileSplit.



The Louisburg boys cross country team will look to earn another trip to the state meet this season.

“We are down a little in numbers but return many state qualifiers,” Reece said. “Practices are going well and we are enjoying this stint of cooler weather. We are again focusing on the end of the season and are setting a goal to return both teams to state again. It is going to be an exciting year.”

Volleyball also has strong numbers out as they had 36 athletes out for tryouts for the first three days and have settled at 30 for the rest of the season between the three levels.



Coach Leanna Willer speaks to her team at practice Thursday following a 3-day tryout.

Despite losing four starters from last season's team that fell one game short of reaching the state tournament, Willer is excited to see what this group can do.

"We've had a great first few days and are seeing really awesome things from our girls that have us excited about what we'll be able to do at all three levels this year," Willer said. "We see a lot of potential at all ages and we are hungry for the opportunities to keep improving and make some noise in the league."

The squad had a busy summer with its team camp in early June, followed by summer league action for two months and the varsity traveled to the University of Nebraska team camp in July. Add in the normal open gyms and weight sessions, Willer is pleased with how her players have improved.

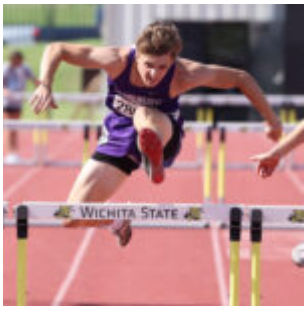


Senior Claire Brown passes the ball during a drill Thursday.

“This was a very busy summer of all sorts of crazy twists and turns with the high school being under construction and schedules constantly changing,” Willer said. “Those that were able to dedicate time and effort consistently throughout the summer improved, not only in skill, but also in confidence. The coaches and athletes were typically here working four days a week with weights, conditioning, and open gyms.

“We love having these summer opportunities to get to know our team better and to start working on our team chemistry as much as possible. As a whole, we have grown a lot over the past couple months and we are looking forward to seeing what we can accomplish here in the next couple.”

Tom Koontz named 2022 Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year



It was the middle of December, with the temperature near freezing, and Tom Koontz was at the track.

Yes, the outdoor track at Wildcat Stadium. As you might expect, there weren't many people around on that frigid day.

Almost six months earlier, Koontz won a state title in the 110-meter high hurdles as a junior, but it was the 300 hurdle race that haunted him. He just couldn't get over finishing as a state runner-up.

"All I could think about was winning state and winning the 300s this time around," Koontz said. "It drove me so much, so winning that race, when it came down to the inches, was basically the definition of achieving a dream."

The hard work, and practicing his craft, all paid off as he got his revenge and won state in the 300 hurdles along with defending with 110 hurdle title in Wichita back in May.

It was Koontz's drive that helped him become one of the pillars of a team that finished as the state champion in 2021 and also one that took third at state this past May.

It was also one of the reasons why Koontz was chosen as the Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year.

“To win this is a huge honor because it adds me to a list of former Louisburg athletes like Blue Caplinger and Weston Guetterman, both people I looked up to for a long time,” Koontz said. “Now it feels like I can be one of those people to be looked up at, and it’s an amazing feeling.”

There weren’t a lot of people necessarily looking up at Koontz on the track – a lot of them were trying to catch him from behind.

Koontz dominated both hurdle races all season long and only lost on a few different occasions. It is a sport, and event, that is a passion of his and it started as freshman.

He came out of nowhere and qualified for state in the 300 hurdles and that lit the spark for what he was to become.

“Track started simply as another sport, but as I started to get better and impress myself with what I was capable of, I felt the need to devote more and more time to it,” Koontz said. “I changed so much for it, like my diet and sleep habits, where I went and who I hung out with, what I did after practice, etc… It was the most important thing to me for a long time.”

Still, as much as he wanted to win a state title in the 300 hurdles, he wasn’t exactly loving it.



The Louisburg High School head coaches voted Tom Koontz and Delaney Wright as the Louisburg Sports Zone Athletes of the Year.

“Since I started running the race freshman year, I never really liked it,” Koontz said. “In fact, I despised it and only liked it for the feeling of finishing it. But coach (Leanna) Willer knew I had potential to be great at it.

“It was the only event I qualified in freshman year, and I was the only freshman on the list for it. So to come back my junior and just barely lose, stuck with me and it was my focus to win this year.”

Not only does Koontz have three state titles under his belt, he has eight career state medals, including four as a member of the 4×100 and 4×400 relay teams. He was a member of the 4×100 that broke the school record at the Frontier League meet last month.

As much love as he has for track, football is right up there for Koontz.

He found himself as one of the Wildcat starting cornerbacks this past season. Koontz finished the year with 46 tackles, four deflections and a forced fumble.

“Football was a sport for me to be a part of a team, that really made me feel like a part of something,” he said. “So finally getting to play the field the whole season was exhilarating, and I wish I could do it again. Having to say goodbye to it was difficult, just ask any of them who saw me after the St. James (playoff) game.

“Playing a sport that creates such powerful emotions like football and track and anything else helped me grow as a person and an athlete, and each one sharpened my ability in and out of the classroom. It’s hard work, but the work is rewarding.”

After four years of competing at the high school level, Koontz doesn’t really have a favorite moment. It is the overall experience that he will remember most.

“It’s hard for me to pick just one thing that sticks out about high school,” Koontz said. “I couldn’t just pick one day. What does stick with me is the idea that one day, I’m not sure when, I went from someone admiring those who could do amazing things, to being the person doing those things. Being able to win homecoming king or be a state champion. It’s unreal that it happened.

“So I would say if anything sticks out the most, it’s the surrealness of it all, and how I was able to make a name for myself, in high school at least. But I’m also glad I could make such good friends and have such great coaches and teachers to support me.”

Previous winners:

2018: Austin Moore

2019: Blue Caplinger

2020: Garrett Rolofson

2021: Weston Guetterman

Doles looking forward to football career at Ottawa University



Louisburg's Brandon Doles is excited for the opportunity to join the Ottawa University football program this fall after a strong senior season for Louisburg.

There was a time where Brandon Doles felt football just wasn't in the cards.

That time came his junior season when he sustained a gruesome leg injury that ended his football and wrestling seasons. It was a long road to recovery.

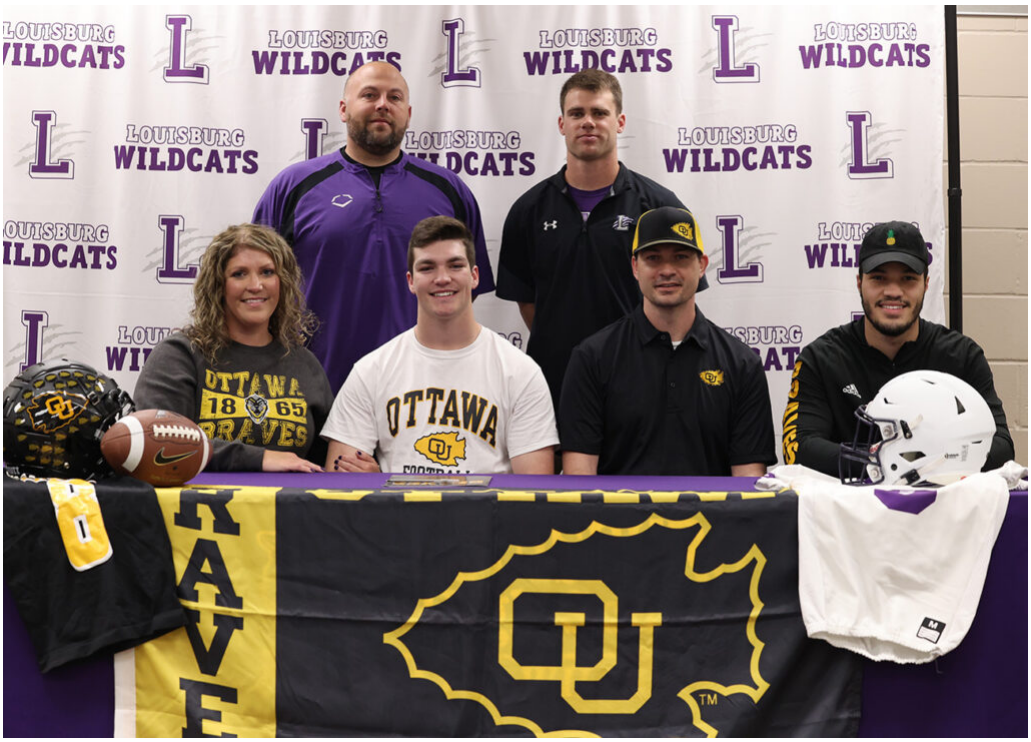
Doles also had a love for baseball and thought it was the sport he wanted to focus on the most. Still, he wanted to give football one last shot and had a strong season for Louisburg in his senior campaign.

What he found out was, his love for the game was still there. So much so, Doles is continuing on at the college level.

Doles signed his letter of intent to play football at Ottawa University earlier this spring and he can't wait to make the jump from high school to college.

“The past couple of years I thought I wanted to play college baseball, especially after my injury,” Doles said. “But after I got back on the field my senior year, I knew that football was what I wanted to do and I can’t wait to continue to play at the next level.”

Ottawa is a familiar place for Doles as his brother, Desmond, also played football for the Braves and he grew up following the Ottawa.



Brandon Doles signed his letter of intent earlier this spring to play football for Ottawa University. Sitting next to Brandon are his parents Desiree and Bryan, along with his brother Desmond. Standing from left is former Louisburg head coach Robert Ebenstein and current head coach Drew Harding.

So when it came to make a decision, he leaned on his brother for some guidance.

“Definitely Dez playing there helped with my decision,” he said. “Watching the team play the last four years has been so much fun. He showed me how great the atmosphere was with the team and on campus and helped me make my decision.”

However, there will be something new to the program that Doles

didn’t see much in those four year – a new coach.

Nick Davis was chosen to take over the program after serving as the defensive coordinator last season.

Defense is where Doles will try to thrive on the football field as the Braves hope to used him as a middle linebacker, along with some time as a long snapper.

“They have some of the best facilities which was a major factor and I really liked their coaching staff when I came and visited,” Doles said. “I’m excited to play for the new head coach in Coach Davis.”

Doles had a big final season for the Wildcats as he was a first-team All-Frontier League selection from the linebacker spot. He finished with 90 tackles and averaged more than 11 per game. He also forced two fumbles.

Now, he hopes some of that success transfers over to the college level.

“Playing college football has always been a dream of mine ever since I was little,” Doles said. “Seeing all my friends and family there at my signing day, supporting me, was the best feeling ever and always knowing they are there to cheer me on is amazing.

“As a freshman it’s gonna be hard to get playing time but I will be working hard all summer and all fall to try and see some time on the field.”

2022 Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year Nominees



For the past six 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 to highlight the athletes.

For the fifth consecutive 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 athletes and then I will tabulate the results and determine the winner. The winner will be announced in the coming days.

Below are the nominees for the Male Athlete of the Year award in alphabetical order by last name. Congrats to all those who were nominated and best of luck!



Aiden Barker, Senior, Football and Wrestling

Aiden Barker played big roles on both the Louisburg football and wrestling teams this past season. Barker was a starting lineman for the Wildcat football program and wrestled at 195 pounds for the wrestling team.

Barker was a key fixture on both sides of the ball for the Wildcat football team, but his biggest impact came on the defensive side. He was a first team All-Frontier League selection on the defensive line, where he finished with 58 tackles on the season to go along with 11 tackles for a loss and 5.5 sacks.

On the wrestling mat, Barker finished his season with a 31-8

record and earned a fifth place medal at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. He was named the Wildcats' wrestler of the year and is a two-time first team KWCA Academic all-state winner. He finished with titles at the December Duals, Tonganoxie and Louisburg Invitationals. He finished his career with a program record of career reversals with 74. He will continue his athletic and academic career as a member of the MidAmerica Nazarene University football program this fall.



Brandon Doles, Senior, Football, Wrestling and Baseball

Brandon was a starter on three Wildcat programs during the 2021-22 school year. Doles was the starting linebacker on the football team, he was a varsity captain and 182-pound wrestler

on the wrestling team and played the outfield and pitched for the Louisburg baseball program.

In football, Doles was a key part of the Wildcat defense as he earned first team all-league honors from the linebacker spot. He finished the season with 90 tackles and averaged 11 stops per contest. He also forced two fumbles and had 11 tackles for a loss during the Wildcats' 4-5 season.

Injuries hampered most of Doles' wrestling season, but he was able to make a comeback late in the season and made his way to his third state tournament. At 182 pounds, Doles was win one short of a medal and finished the year with a 9-5 record. Doles ended his career as a two-time team captain and first team KWCA Academic All-State recipient.

On the baseball diamond, Doles was one of the Wildcats' top hitters during the 2022 season that saw them end with an 8-14 record and a spot in the regional championship game. Doles, who started in left field, finished with a .338 average and a .969 OPS. He also had 24 hits, seven doubles and two home runs to go along with 17 RBIs and 22 runs scored. Doles also earned second team All-Frontier League honors.



Kolby Kattau, Senior, Football and Baseball

Kolby was a senior starter for both the Louisburg football and baseball teams this past season. Kattau was the starting first baseman and pitcher for the baseball program that reached the regional championship. He was a two-way starter on the football team at running back and safety.

On the baseball diamond, Kattau thrived for the 2022 season as he was named as a first-team All-Frontier and all-state selection for his play at first base. Kattau had a team-high .471 average in 82 plate appearances. He had an OPS of 1.294 and had 33 hits on the season with seven doubles, five triples and a home run. He also scored 24 runs and had 13 RBIs from the leadoff spot. He started five games for the Wildcats and

earned three wins with 25 strikeouts. Kattau was also selected to participate in the KABC all-star game.

On the football field, Kattau was one of the team’s starting running backs and recorded two touchdowns with more than 200 yards of total offense. He also started at safety for much of the season as well, and finished with 27 tackles and three deflections.



Tom Koontz, Senior, Football and Track and Field

Tom was a starting defensive back for the Wildcat football team that finished with a 4-5 record, along with being a hurdler and sprinter on the Louisburg track team.

On the track, Koontz helped the Wildcats to a third place team finish at the Class 4A state meet as he earned a pair of state titles in the hurdles and two more medals on relays. Koontz won the 300-meter hurdles with a school record time of 38.98 seconds and also won the state title in the 110 hurdles for the second straight year in 14.61 seconds.

He also helped the 4×400 relay to a fourth place state finish and the 4×100 relay to a sixth place medal. Koontz was also a part of the 4×100 team that broke the school record earlier in the year. He ends his Wildcat career as a 3-time state champion in the hurdles and garnered eight state medals. He was also a member of the 2021 state championship team.

Koontz also made his presence known on the football field as he was a starting cornerback for the Wildcats. He finished the year with 46 tackles, four deflections and a forced fumble.



Maverick Rockers, Senior, Basketball and Baseball

Maverick played key roles for the Wildcat basketball and baseball teams this season. Rockers was the starting point guard in basketball and made an impact on the baseball team as the starting shortstop.

On the baseball diamond, Rockers helped the Wildcats to their second straight regional championship game and had a big year at the plate. Rockers finished with a .406 batting average with a 1.111 OPS. He recorded 28 hits, seven doubles and two home runs to go along with 22 runs scored and 16 RBIs. He also had just six errors from his shortstop position. Following the season, he was named as a second team All-Frontier League player.

Rockers also had a big year on the basketball court as the team’s starting point guard. He averaged 11 points a game to go along with three rebounds, two assists and 1.5 steals a game.



Michael Seuferling, Senior, Soccer and Basketball

Michael had big seasons for the Louisburg soccer and basketball teams in 2021-22. Seuferling was a starting defender for the Wildcat soccer team that made it to the regional championship game and was a starting guard for the Wildcat basketball program.

On the soccer field, Seuferling was one of the best outside backs in the Frontier League and was a first team all-league performer for Louisburg. He was also a first-team all-state player as he helped the Wildcats to a No. 1 seed in the Class 4-1A state playoffs.

Seuferling was also one of the top basketball players in the

Frontier League as earned honorable mention honors after leading the Wildcats in scoring. He averaged 13.3 points per contest to go along with 3.4 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.



Braden Yows, Senior, Soccer

Braden had a big season for the Louisburg boys soccer team as he helped lead the Wildcats to the No. 1 seed in the Class 4-1A state playoffs and a spot in the regional championship game.

Yows was named as a first-team All-Frontier League and all-state player from his midfield spot and was named team captain. He ended his season with a 17 goals and 11 assists. He will continue his soccer career this fall at the University

of Missouri-Kansas City.

Barker excited to join MidAmerica Nazarene football program



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker recently signed his letter of intent to play football at MidAmerica Nazarene University this coming fall.

Football has always been a big part of Aiden Barker's life, and by the time his high school career was done, Barker wasn't ready to leave the sport he loves in the rear view mirror.

Instead, Barker gets a chance to fulfill a lifelong dream close to home.

In late April, the Louisburg senior signed his letter of intent to play at MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe next season and he is ready to get started.

"College football has been a dream of mine since a was a little kid running around with a football in my hands hoping to be the next great player," Barker said. "It meant a lot to me to sign in front of my friends and family and to have all those who have supported me and pushed me to get where I'm at

now being able to sign and play at the collegiate level.”

Barker was a force on the offensive and defensive lines for the Wildcats, but it was his performance on the defensive side where he made his mark.

As a defensive end, Barker was a first-team All-Frontier League selection as he finished with 58 tackles on the season to go along with 11 tackles for a loss and 5.5 sacks.



Louisburg’s Aiden Barker signed his letter of intent to play football at MidAmerica Nazarene in late April. Seated next to Aiden are his parents Dave and Gail Barker and his brother Cameron Barker.

He will be playing a similar position with the Pioneers, but one that offers more flexibility and fits his strengths better. He will be playing as a standup defensive end that will drop back and play like a linebacker.

Although it is going to be a big transition for him, Barker knows he will have a chance to succeed if he puts the effort into it.

“I’m really excited to move onto the next level of football,” Barker said. “I put pretty high expectations on myself to go

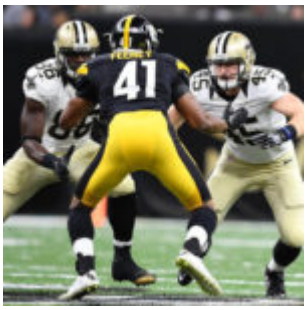
out and perform at my best.”

When weighing his options, Barker felt right at home when he made his visit to MidAmerica and he felt at ease with the Pioneer coaching staff, and head coach Paul Hansen.

“I picked this coaching staff because they came off as great people and they really wanted to get to know you so that they could evaluate if you could fit in with the others and if you were going to be able to build a better program in the future.,” Barker said.

“I liked MidAmerica because they stood out to me as really genuine people and I think that the program is going to be able to mold me into a better player.”

Griffin moves on from New Orleans, signs with Detroit Lions



Garrett Griffin, who spent the last six seasons with the New Orleans, will sign a contract with the Detroit Lions according to multiple reports.

After six seasons with the New Orleans Saints, Garrett Griffin will have a new home in the National Football League.

According to multiple reports from NFL writers Aaron Wilson and Tom Peliserro, Griffin will sign with the Detroit Lions. Griffin is currently in Colorado Springs taking care of his yearly commitment with the Air Force Academy.

> *Garrett Griffin (Saints) is signing with the Detroit Lions, per a league source. Griffin played for Dan Campbell when Campbell coached tight ends for the Saints. Griffin is currently taking care of his yearly Air Force commitment in Colorado Springs*
>
> *— Aaron Wilson (@AaronWilson_NFL) March 17, 2022*

> *Former #Saints TE Garrett Griffin is signing with the #Lions, per source. Griffin played for Dan Campbell when Campbell coached TEs for the Saints. Griffin is currently taking care of his yearly Air Force commitment in Colorado Springs.*
>
> *— Tom Pelissero (@TomPelissero) March 17, 2022*



Griffin, who is a 2012 graduate of Louisburg High School, worked his way on to the Saints roster in his five years, despite battling numerous injuries. He recorded five catches

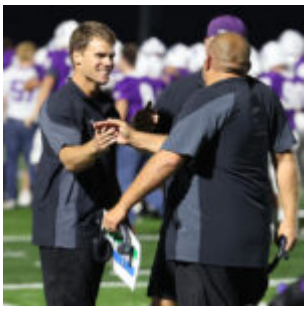
for 43 yards in the regular season during those five years.

His most memorable moment came in the NFC Championship game in 2018 when he caught two passes for 12 yards, including a touchdown from Drew Brees.

According to those reports, Griffin chose the Lions based on his relationship with Detroit head coach Dan Campbell. Campbell served as the Saints tight end coach during much of Griffin's time in New Orleans.

Last season, the Lions finished with a 3-13-1 record and finished fourth in the NFC North.

Harding excited for opportunity as Wildcat head football coach



Drew Harding was hired to be the next Louisburg High School head football coach last week after the district decided not to renew the contract of former coach Robert Ebenstein.

The Louisburg football program will have a different leader on the sidelines starting next season.

The USD 416 Board of Education approved the hire of LHS assistant coach Drew Harding to be the team's new head coach

last Monday after the district decided not to renew the contact of former coach Robert Ebenstein.

Harding has spent the last five seasons as a Wildcat assistant coach, including time as a defensive coordinator. He is a 2010 Louisburg graduate and was a big part of the Wildcat program during his time as a student-athlete at Louisburg High School.

However, Harding didn't see himself be a head coach of any sport coming out of college.

"It means a lot," Harding said. "When I got out of school, I didn't get into education right away and started somewhere else. I decided to get into education because of the impact my former coaches at Louisburg had on me. To come full circle and to be in the position that I am in now, is pretty surreal. I am really excited for the opportunity and hopefully I can have the same type of impact on student athletes as they come through the program."

Ebenstein has the been the head coach the last five seasons and helped the Wildcats to a 30-18 record during that time, including a Frontier League and regional title in 2018. He had a winning record three of those five seasons.

He was also named the KFCA Coach of the Year during that season and was selected to be an assistant coach for the Kansas Shrine Bowl. He was an assistant coach for the Wildcat program for five years before earning the head coaching job.

"I appreciate the time and dedication coach Ebenstein put into the football program and summer weights and conditioning," Louisburg activities director Michael Pickman said. "In his time as head coach of Louisburg, he had successful seasons and accolades as well. I wish him the best moving forward."

Ebenstein was hoping to continue on as the Wildcat head coach, but he wanted to thank all of those that have helped him along the way.

“I would just like to take a moment to thank every player who I had the opportunity to coach for all of their effort and time,” Ebenstein said. “All of the managers, parents, announcers, and kitchen support for all of the countless hours they put into Louisburg Football. Also, a huge thank you to all of the amazing guys that I had the honor to coach with, I know they will continue to lead as they always have.



Kicker Drake Varns leaps into the arms of Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein after making a field goal during a previous season.

“I know Coach Harding is a great coach, mentor, and friend and

will do an amazing job as head football coach. I wish him and the football family nothing but the very best. With the talent that will be returning next year, with a season's worth of experience, the sky's the limit. When learning has to take place, I hope that Coach Harding gets the support that he and all coaches deserve."

When the district decided to move in a different direction at head coach, Louisburg interviewed a handful of candidates, but Harding stood out among the rest.

"I am excited for Drew Harding to have the opportunity to lead the football program," Pickman said. "He will bring an energy and passion that will provide a culture of hard work, accountability and family on and off the field. He is well respected by the staff and students and knows the current players and the league and the community, which gives him the ability to relate to all patrons and players of the program being familiar with the tradition and expectations Louisburg has of its football program and all the benefits a Louisburg educational and athletic opportunity has to offer.

"He started as a dedicated player and graduate at Louisburg, has been a dedicated assistant coach and teacher, and now enters the next chapter as head coach of Louisburg football. This Louisburg foundation and experiences in his time will allow him to build upon strong relationships he already has and instill those high expectations to which he holds himself to the athletes he coaches so they can rise to those same expectations and levels of success."

Harding was a starting quarterback for the Wildcats during his time in high school and helped Louisburg to a playoff run before falling to Bishop Miege in 2009.

Since coming back to Louisburg as a teacher, Harding began his coaching career an assistant basketball before joining the assistant ranks for the football team. He hopes that his

coaching experience, and being an LHS graduate, can be a positive in his transition.

“It does help,” Harding said. “I am really lucky that when I came through high school that we had some really good teams and really good athletes at that time. I think it helps me to have seen that and experience that. All the coaches that have come before me have set the foundation for what this program is and have set me up for success.

“It is not like I need to reinvent the wheel or anything, I just need to carry on the tradition that was already there. For me being an assistant was huge to see how things work and how to approach things and learn from all the other coaches.”

Harding has had many positives experiences in being an assistant for Ebenstein and Ty Pfannenstiel on the basketball side.

“I just pick things up from other coaches,” Harding said. “Coach Pfannenstiel is big in developing the athlete overall. He is big on preaching character and commitment and stands by his word and holds kids accountable on the court and outside.

“Coach E (Ebenstein) always had a great way that he could relate and interact with kids. I think that they respected him and he was a guy that was always there for his assistant coaches. He always stood up for his assistants, delegated tasks and let his assistants run with it. Those are really some of the biggest takeaways that I have working under those two guys.”

According to Harding, all of the assistants will return for next season and will have one open position to hire later in the year.

He is looking forward to putting his own stamp on the program and doing so with several returning varsity players.

“I have to be me,” Harding said. “There are certain things that will change, but I am not going to reinvent the wheel and do things 100 percent different. There will be some changes that I’ll do because I have to be me. There have been a lot of really good coaches that have come before me that have set the stage, and my job is to keep that going and put my stamp and flair to the program.

“It is exciting to be a head coach and already having a relationship with the kids. It give us an ability to go on a nice little run right out of the gate. We have a solid junior class, a solid sophomore class and a good freshman class. I’m looking forward to combining all their talents and be competitive.”

Wildcats earn 11 spots on all-league football; four selected first team



It was an up and down season for the Louisburg football team, but it was one that saw the Wildcats earn four league victories.

Several Wildcats were recognized on the All-Frontier League team, that was released on Monday.

Louisburg earned 11 spots on the all-league squad, including four first-team selections. Seven Wildcats earned honors overall.

“This year the Frontier League was extremely tough and every week was a challenge,” Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein said. “Every team had at least one loss to another league school, so it was very competitive all year long. As for our all-league representation, we did very well considering how tough the league was. We had four guys represented on the offensive side of the ball, five guys on the defensive side and two in the special teams category.”

The league coaches were impressed with the talent the Wildcats had on defense as they earned seven spots on that side of the ball.

Junior J.R. Rooney (defensive tackle), senior Aiden Barker (defensive end), senior Brandon Doles (linebacker) and junior Jase Hovey (defensive back) were each named to the first team.



Another junior, Layne Ryals, was also named as a second team punter, and honorable mention kicker and multipurpose defensive player.

“Our defense played really really well in most games,” Ebenstein said. “We knew going into the season that our run defense was going to be a strength of our team, and it certainly was. Then to add safeties like Jase Hovey and Layne Ryals with the run support they could provide in the alleys it was tough to establish the run against us.”

Starting on the inside, Rooney was disruptive up the middle as he had 56 tackles on the year, including 9.5 tackles for a loss. Barker was just as tough on the outside as he had 58 stops, 5.5 sacks and 11 tackles for a loss.

From the linebacker spot, Doles finished with 90 tackles and averaged more than 11 per game. He also forced two fumbles.



Hovey led the Wildcats with 99 tackles on the season, including 58 stops and had two interceptions in the secondary.

“All four of our first team guys played very well all year, and when you think about the type of football we play it makes since that a unit would have four first team players,” Ebenstein said. “We always preach about doing your job, and your job only. If everyone does their job you begin to have

complementary football, and when I look at the four guys who received first team All-League, I can say with confidence that they all were assignment sound players who listened to their coaching and put themselves in positions to make plays.”



Ryals totaled 677 yards on the season punting the ball and made 15 of 19 extra points on the season. He was also a key part of the Wildcat defense as he finished with 41 tackles.

Junior linebacker Nathan Vincent, another important piece of the Louisburg defense, earned honorable mention honors. Vincent ended the year with 90 tackles and averaged 10 stops per game.

Offensively, the Wildcats were shut out of the first team honors, but had a pair of players on the second team.



Barker was an all-league selection on both sides of the ball as he was second team on the offensive line.

Junior Mason Dobbins was a second team wide receiver as he finished with 30 catches, 519 yards and four touchdowns.

Sophomore quarterback Declan Battle had a big first year for the Wildcats as he led the team with 1,000 yards through the air to go along with seven touchdowns.



Battle was also the team’s leading rusher with 810 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Senior Kolby Kattau was named as an honorable mention running back as he had two touchdowns and more than 200 yards of total offense.



ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE FOOTBALL

OFFENSE

First Team

LINEMAN – Antonio Caballero, Bonner Springs, senior; Tyler Neis, Eudora, senior; Dalton Picek, Paola, senior; Camden Beebe, Piper, junior; Aiden Palmer, Spring Hill, senior

RUNNING BACK – Brayden Beerbower, Eudora, senior; Jovanni Blackie, Paola, senior; Caden Rhamy, Paola, senior

QUARTERBACK – Gage Hayden, Eudora, senior

WIDE RECEIVER – Adrion Seals, Eudora, sophomore; Divante Herrig-Brittian, Piper, senior; Daniel Mitchell, Spring Hill, senior

TIGHT END – Jaden Hamm, Eudora, junior

MULTIPURPOSE – Sam Kleidosty, Tonganoxie, senior

KICKER – Jackson McWilliams, Tonganoxie, sophomore

RETURNER – Zach Knowlton, Spring Hill, senior

Second Team

LINEMAN – **Aiden Barker, Louisburg, senior**; Kale Murdock, Paola, junior; Cameron Rogers, Piper, junior; Connor Bruch, Tonganoxie, senior; Logan Blancarte, Tonganoxie, senior

RUNNING BACK – Zion Woodin, Ottawa, junior; Draven Pipkin, Spring Hill, junior; Colton Brusven, Tonganoxie, sophomore

QUARTERBACK – Fletcher Pankey, Spring Hill, senior

WIDE RECEIVER – **Mason Dobbins, Louisburg, junio**r; Ethan Walker, Piper, senior; Isaiah Holthaus, Tonganoxie, sophomore

TIGHT END – Colin Vigil, Piper, junior

MULTIPURPOSE – Zach Knowlton, Spring Hill, senior

KICKER – Dominic McCoy, Paola, senior

RETURNER – Adrion Seals, Eudora, sophomore

Honorable Mention

LINEMAN – Jake Van Horn, Baldwin, freshman; Zane Clark, Bonner Springs, senior; Ben Suber, Eudora, senior; Derek Gomez, Ottawa, junior; Adam Doran, Ottawa, senior; Grant Celano, Paola, senior; Aidan Wegele, Spring Hill, senior

RUNNING BACK – Peyton Parks, Bonner Springs, junior; **Kolby Kattau, Louisburg, senior;** Layton Brandt, Paola, senior

QUARTERBACK – **Declan Battle, Louisburg, sophomore**; Blake Porter, Piper, senior; Noah McCullough, Ottawa, senior

WIDE RECEIVER – Sam Darnell, Baldwin, junior; JD Andrewjeski, Bonner Springs, senior; Kameron Crotchett, Spring Hill, senior

TIGHT END – Zayne Now, Baldwin, senior; Andrew Colvert, Tonganoxie, senior

MULTIPURPOSE – Silas Etter, Eudora, senior

KICKER – **Layne Ryals, Louisburg, junior**; Reese Fogle, Ottawa, senior; Zane Busick, Piper, junior

RETURNER – Jouse Navarro, Ottawa, sophomore; Divante Herrig-Brittian, Piper, senior

DEFENSE

First Team

TACKLES – **J.R. Rooney, Louisburg, junior;** Cameron Rogers, Piper, junior; Connor Bruch, Tonganoxie, senior

ENDS – **Aiden Barker, Louisburg, senior;** Mark Debiak, Spring Hill, sophomore

LINEBACKERS – Mason L'Heureux, Piper, junior; **Brandon Doles, Louisburg; senior**; Caden Rhamy, Poala, senior; Austin Rivers, Spring Hill, senior; Andrew Colvert, Tonganoxie, senior

BACKS – **Jase Hovey, Louisburg, junior**; Zach Knowlton, Spring Hill, senior; Sam Kleidosty, Tonganoxie, senior; Ethan Walker, Piper, senior

MULTIPURPOSE – Colin Vigil, Piper, junior

PUNTER – Caleb Chandler, Spring Hill, senior

Second Team

TACKLES – Antonio Caballero, Bonner Springs, senior; Kale Murdock, Paola, junior; Camden Beebe, Piper, junior

ENDS – Dalton Picek, Paola, senior; Lamar Lynch, Piper,

sophomore

LINEBACKERS – Brandin Andrew, Bonner Springs, senior; Trenton Long, Eudora, senior; Layton Moore, Paola, senior; Garrah Bauer, Spring Hill, senior

BACKS – Kale Hammerschmidt, Eudora, junior; Divante Herrig-Brittian, Piper, senior; Carter Meade, Spring Hill, senior; Wyatt Harris, Tonganoxie, junior

MULTIPURPOSE – Brayden Beerbower, Eudora, senior

PUNTER – **Layne Ryals, Louisburg, junior**

Honorable Mention

TACKLES – Micah Barron, Eudora, junior; Adam Doran, Ottawa, senior; Keanu Tiafau, Spring Hill, sophomore

ENDS – Evan Cameron, Piper, sophomore

LINEBACKERS – Wesley Martin, Baldwin, junior; **Nathan Vincent, Louisburg, junior**; Parker Guge, Ottawa, sophomore; Clayton Forrest, Paola, senior; Terrel Anderson, Piper, junior

BACKS – Miguel Andazola, Baldwin, senior; Adrion Seals, Eudora, sophomore; Tiernan Reed-Cox, Ottawa, senior; Trey Moala, Paola, senior; Carter Meade, Spring Hill, senior; Wyatt Harris, Tonganoxie, junior

MULTIPURPOSE – **Layne Ryals, Louisburg, junior**

PUNTER – Jayce Smith, Bonner Springs, senior; Reese Fogle, Ottawa, senior