

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 Seufferling, 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.

Four Wildcats earn all-state recognition



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner (53) was selected to the Class 4A all-state first team by the Topeka Capital-Journal and Wichita Eagle. Koechner led the Wildcats with 67 tackles on the year.

Louisburg football had its best season in four years and some members of the team are continuing to receive honors because of it.

The Wildcats, who won a regional championship, had four players earn all-state recognition by two major Kansas newspapers when teams were released Sunday.

Senior lineman Mason Koechner led the way as he was named to the Class 4A all-state first team offense by the Topeka Capital-Journal and first team defense by the Wichita Eagle. Koechner was also selected as an honorable mention offensive lineman by the Eagle.

Three other Wildcats also earned honorable mention honors.

Senior Dustyn Rizzo was selected by both papers as an honorable mention lineman. The Capital-Journal and Eagle also placed senior running back Thomas San Agustin as an honorable mention.

Korbin Hankinson, another Louisburg senior, earned honorable mention defensive back honors from the Eagle.



Louisburg senior Korbin Hankinson (left), Thomas San Agustin (middle) and Dustyn Rizzo were selected to the Class 4A all-

state honorable mention team.

Koechner had a big season on the defensive side of the ball as he led the Wildcats with 67 tackles, including two sacks, and two tackles for a loss. Offensively, Koechner, along with Rizzo, led a Louisburg offensive line that opened holes for more than 3,800 yards of total offense.

Defensively, Rizzo finished with 39 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble.

San Agustin had a good season in the Wildcat backfield as he finished with 916 yards on the ground to go along with 18 touchdowns. He also had 213 yards receiving on the year.

As for Hankinson, he had a big season in the defensive backfield for Louisburg. Hankinson led the team with five interceptions and five deflections.

Koechner, Rizzo lead Louisburg on all-league list



Louisburg seniors Dustyn Rizzo (left) and Mason Koechner were recently named first team all-Frontier League selections on both sides of the ball. The Wildcats earned eight first-team spots on the all-league football team.

The Frontier League provided plenty of talent on the gridiron this past season and the Louisburg High School football team was responsible for a good portion of it.

The Wildcats finished the season with an 8-3 record, including a 4-2 mark in league play and also earned the school's first regional championship in four years. Thanks to that, Louisburg was awarded several spots on the all-Frontier League team that was released last week.

Six players were given first-team honors, including two that earned a spot on both sides of the ball. The Wildcats also ended up with a second-team selection and six honorable mention spots.

"I am not a big fan of all league teams, because a lot of deserving kids don't get the notice they deserve," Louisburg co-head coach Gary Griffin said. "A lot of times the kids that do the dirty work don't have the stats to get postseason honors. After saying that, I thought we were represented pretty well, considering that we finished third in the league. You always want more kids on the first team, but we had some pretty good teams in our league with Ottawa, Spring Hill and De Soto that had deserving kids as well."

Senior lineman Mason Koechner and Dustyn Rizzo were given high marks by the rest of the league coaches as both players were selected to the first team offensive and defensive lines. On the offensive line, Koechner and Rizzo helped pave the way for 3,837 yards of total offense on the season.

Defensively, Koechner led the Wildcats with 67 tackles on the year, including two sacks and two tackles for a loss. Rizzo finished with 39 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble.



Louisburg quarterback Grant Harding (left) and running back Thomas San Agustin were both named first team all-league selections

“I thought our entire offensive line had a good year,” Griffin said. “Mason and Dustyn had great years on both sides of the ball. They rarely, if ever, missed a snap in games and in practice. They were both warriors that are very deserving.”

Running back Thomas San Agustin and quarterback Grant Harding were also named to the offensive first team, while sophomore Austin Moore (linebacker) and senior Korbin Hankinson (defensive back) were selected to the defensive first team.

Harding threw for 842 yards and ran for 752 yards and six touchdowns to lead the Wildcat offense. San Agustin led Louisburg in rushing with 916 yards on the season and averaged seven yards per carry to go along with 18 touchdowns.



Louisburg senior defensive back Korbin Hankinson (left) and sophomore linebacker Austin Moore were both named to the all-Frontier League Defensive first team.

Hankinson was a spark in the defensive backfield with five interceptions on the season and also had five deflections. As a first-year varsity starter, Moore was a big part of the Wildcat defense from the middle linebacker spot as he finished with 64 tackles, four for a loss to go along with two fumble recoveries and two interceptions.

“Both Grant and Thomas have been 3-year contributors and I was glad to see them get recognized,” Griffin said. “Because we had so many people that could carry the ball their stats were not as good as some others in the league. I thought Grant was solid in both the running game and passing game. He knew the offense and did a great job of leading the team.

“On defense Korbin was the guy who we put on the other team’s best receiver. We played against some pretty good people and he did a great job. Austin did a good job of making sure we

were aligned. He got a lot of on the job training and got better and better each game. He has a bright future.”



Wildcat linemen Garrett Lowry (left) and T.J. Dover were both all-league honorable mention selections on the offensive line. Dover was also put on the honorable mention defensive line.

Harding also earned second team honors at the defensive back spot with 26 tackles, six batted balls and an interception.

Four Wildcats earned honorable mention honors as senior T.J. Dover (offensive and defensive line), San Agustin (linebacker), Hankinson (wide receiver), Jake Hill (running back) and junior Garrett Lowry (offensive line) were also recognized.

Dover and Lowry were key cogs in the Wildcat offensive line as

they helped open holes for the Louisburg backs that rushed for almost 3,000 yards on the season.



Fullback Jake Hill earned all-league honorable mention honors on offense.

Hill also did his fair share of blocking from the fullback spot to lead the way for the team's 35 rushing touchdowns on the season. As for Hankinson, he stretched the field on opposing defenses as he caught 20 passes for 489 yards and scored many of his 13 touchdowns through the air.

Defensively, Dover finished with 37 tackles, including three for a loss, while San Agustin had 34 tackles, four for a loss, two fumble recoveries and a sack.

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE FOOTBALL

OFFENSE

FIRST TEAM

LINE: Drew Bones, senior, Ottawa; **Mason Koechner, senior, Louisburg**; Marshall Kellner, junior, De Soto; Sam Arnold, senior, Spring Hill; **Dustyn Rizzo, senior, Louisburg**

BACKS/RECEIVERS: Isaac McCullough, senior, Ottawa; **Thomas San Agustin, senior, Louisburg**; Bryce Mohl, junior, De Soto; Devion Bethea, junior, Ottawa; Jacob Letellier, senior, Spring Hill; **Grant Harding, senior, Louisburg**

KICKER: Ethan Rodriguez, junior, De Soto

SECOND TEAM

LINE: Brock Reed, senior, Ottawa; Nick Sprague, senior, Spring Hill; Caleb McQuality, senior, De Soto; Cam Seck, senior, Paola; Jacob James, junior, Spring Hill

BACKS/RECEIVERS: Ty Straw, senior, Spring Hill; Mason Clark, senior, De Soto; Trevor Watts, junior, De Soto; Cooper Diel, senior, Ottawa; Justin Howard, senior, Baldwin; Nathan Ewing, junior, Spring Hill

HONORABLE MENTION

LINE: Jalen Christianson, senior, De Soto; **T.J. Dover, senior, Louisburg**; Brock Huddlestun, senior, Ottawa; Jackson McCally, senior, Ottawa; Ethan Leahew, senior, Eudora; Blaine Hanf, senior, Paola; **Garrett Lowry, junior, Louisburg**; Shelton Shivley, senior, Baldwin; Dustin Adler, junior Eudora; Cameron Bruns, senior, Baldwin

BACKS/RECEIVERS: **Korbin Hankinson, senior, Louisburg**; Lee Andrews, senior, Eudora; Bryce Huber, senior, Paola; Donavan Sutti, senior, Paola; Darren Winans, junior, De Soto; Drew Boeh, senior, Ottawa; **Jake Hill, senior, Louisburg**; Luke Laskowski, junior, Baldwin

DEFENSE

FIRST TEAM

LINE: **Mason Koechner, senior, Louisburg**; Zach Titus, junior, De Soto; Keegan Crotchett, junior, Spring Hill; **Dustyn Rizzo, senior, Louisburg**

LINEBACKERS: Jack Barger, junior, De Soto; Brock Reed, senior, Ottawa, Justyn Kyner, senior, Spring Hill; **Austin Moore, sophomore, Louisburg**

BACKS: Chance Montgomery, senior, De Soto; **Korbin Hankinson, senior, Louisburg**; Mason Bell, junior, Spring Hill

PUNTER: Jacob Letellier, senior, Spring Hill

SECOND TEAM

LINE: Drew Bones, senior, Ottawa; Lawson Marshall, senior, De Soto; Tanner Moala, senior, Paola; Austin Ormsby, junior, Eudora

LINEBACKERS: Trevor Gress, junior, De Soto; Cooper Diel, senior, Ottawa; Justin Howard, senior, Baldwin; Joseph Briggs, senior, Spring Hill

BACKS: Tyler Arndt, senior, Ottawa; **Grant Harding, senior, Louisburg**; Gavin Elston, sophomore, Eudora

PUNTER: Jackson Thaemert, senior, De Soto

HONORABLE MENTION

LINE: Caleb Flory, senior, Baldwin; **T.J. Dover, senior, Louisburg**; Aaron George, senior, Spring Hill; Nathan Rossmeisl, senior, Spring Hill; Daric Coffee, senior, De Soto

LINEBACKERS: Max Barger, senior, De Soto; Kahlil Thrasher, junior, Eudora; Ryan Verbanic, senior, Eudora; Magnus Van Hoecke, senior, Paola; Noah Schwartz, senior, Paola; **Thomas San Agustin, senior, Louisburg**; Thomas Ryckert, senior, Paola; Jacob James, junior, Spring Hill

BACKS: Trajan McCormick, junior, Spring Hill; Jake Griffiths, senior, De Soto; Andrew Phillips, senior, Paola; Colton Gleghorn, junior, Paola; Drew Smith, junior, Paola; Nathan Ewing, junior, Spring Hill; Lee Andrews, senior, Eudora

Koechner a semifinalist for Bobby Bell Award



Louisburg High School senior Mason Koechner was recently named a semifinalist for the Bobby Bell Award, which is for the Kansas City area's best small class lineman or linebacker.

Semifinalists for the Thomas A. Simone football awards were recently announced and a Louisburg High School student found his way onto one of the lists.

Senior Mason Koechner was named a semifinalist for the Bobby Bell Award, which is given to the most outstanding small class lineman or linebacker. The four finalists for each award will be announced on Nov. 28 at the Kansas City Chiefs Hall of Honor at Arrowhead Stadium.

The awards are for the top football players in the Kansas City area.

Koechner anchored the Wildcat defense with his play on the line. He led Louisburg with 67 tackles on the season to go along with two sacks and two tackles for a loss.

The winners will be unveiled Dec. 6 at the school of the Simone Award recipient – which is the best high school football player in the Kansas City area. Players from both sides of the state line are nominated for the award.

Louisburg is no stranger to these awards as 2011 LHS graduate Tyler Ewy won the Bobby Bell Award in 2010 after helping the Wildcats to their first state title.

Here are a list of all the awards and the semifinalists:

Bobby Bell Award (most outstanding small class lineman or linebacker): Diaz Elliott, Richmond; Colin Grunhard, Bishop Miege; **Mason Koechner, Louisburg**; Derek Kohler, Platte County; Ethan Luft, Kearney; Marquae Richardson, Center; John Taylor, Center; Kole Wagener, Grain Valley; Joe Watskey, Bishop Miege; TJ Williams, Basehor-Linwood.

Thomas A. Simone Award (most outstanding player): Jafar Armstrong, Bishop Miege; James Bailey, William Chrisman; Matt Dercher, Blue Valley; Mario Goodrich, Lee's Summit West;

Chester Graves, Park Hill; Dalton Hill, Lee's Summit; Robert Rawie, Liberty; Julian Ross, Staley; Cornelius Ruff, Schlagle; Will Schneider, Shawnee Mission North.

Frank Fontana Award (most outstanding small-class player): Trevon Alexander, Richmond; JJ Letcher, Piper; Justin Mitchell, Platte County; Justin Phillips, Basehor-Linwood; Anthony Pritzel, Kearney; Carter Putz, Bishop Miege; Amaun Ryan, Center; Mason Smith, Odessa; Landry Weber, Bishop Miege; Rachaad White, Center.

Buck Buchanan Award (most outstanding lineman or linebacker): Daniel Carson, William Chrisman; Jay Dineen, Lawrence Free State; Chester Graves, Park Hill; Kirrian Kirby, Blue Valley; Peter Klug, Blue Valley North; Michael Maffry, Blue Valley; Daniel Parker, Blue Springs; Anthony Payne, Raymore-Peculiar; Eli Ross, Staley; Seven Wilson, Park Hill.

Otis Taylor Award (most outstanding wide receiver or tight end): Jafar Armstrong, Bishop Miege; Somaj Brewer, Lee's Summit; Cristian Cox, Center; Da'Ron Davis, Lee's Summit North; Jess Davis, Kearney; Jordan Martin, Turner; Zack Sanders, Lawrence Free State; Nick Snider, Belton; Trevor Thompson, Shawnee Mission East; Harrison Van Dyne, Blue Valley.

OPINION: Wildcats overcome adversity for special season



Seniors on the Louisburg High School football team huddle up one final time to hold the Class 4A Division I sectional runner-up plaque. The Wildcats overcame a lot of adversity and came together for a special season.

Thinking about what to write about following Friday's playoff loss to Bishop Miege, I had several different options from which to choose.

There is ol' "private schools have an unfair advantage" mantra and how hard it is for public schools to compete against them. All true – but don't want to go there today.

Or what about how broken the classification system is in the Kansas State High School Activities Association? Again, very true. However, there is something else that deserves top billing.

Instead of griping how it is unfair for teams like Louisburg to have to compete against teams like Bishop Miege on the Class 4A level, it is important to recognize the Wildcat football team and all it has accomplished this season.

The Wildcats were faced with an uphill battle from the start of the season, and just like Friday in facing the best team in Class 4A, they took the challenge head on and didn't back down.

Imagine being a player on the football team. You worked hard all summer, put in the time to get better and you realize this season has a chance to be something special. A group of 16

seniors and coaches did everything they could to put the team in the right spot to succeed.

Then a week before the season, head coach Kyle Littrell resigned his post and the Wildcats were left wondering who their leader was going to be. It was a difficult situation for everyone.

However, the players didn't sulk about it. They weren't going to let it affect their season and they got some help along the way.

Former head coach, and current assistant, Gary Griffin and assistant Jeff Lohse took on the head coaching responsibilities. Robert Ebenstein watched over the special teams, while coaches Jason Spradling, Joel McGhee and Zach Livingston all filled in where they were needed.

Those guys took the players under their wing and kept them focused on the task at hand and it was a difficult one – one that featured a tough schedule and lots of distractions.

All the Wildcats did was win five straight games to start the season and crept their way into the state rankings. They could have let a close road loss to Spring Hill, or a district playoff loss to Ottawa get them down – but they didn't.

The players bounced back in each instance and were stronger for it. Following the Ottawa loss, the Wildcats were faced with a must-win situation in the final game of the season on the road at rival Paola – a team they haven't beaten since 2010.

It was an important game in more ways than one. The Paola game was one the Wildcats had circled since before the season started and it was a contest Littrell wanted his players to get.

Even though he wasn't pacing on the sideline, the players

still heeded Littrell's words and went out and downed the Panthers 35-7. The Wildcats also secured a playoff berth at the same time.

Following the game, all the senior players tracked down Littrell to get a picture with their former coach and made he sure got to enjoy the victory, a win that had been a long time coming.

Louisburg wasn't done celebrating, though.

The next week, the Wildcats ventured to Independence for the regional playoffs and earned a 20-0 shutout to get their first playoff win since 2012. It was an amazing night for these group of players as they reveled in what it felt like to get a victory in the playoffs.

They also made sure their former coach got to touch the regional championship plaque as the entire team ran to the opposite end of the field to track down Littrell and they all celebrated around him.

You see, this team has been a family since day one. They have stuck by each other through the good times and bad, and they wanted to achieve that ultimate prize.

To get there, the Wildcats knew they would have to conquer the highest mountain of all in defending state champion Bishop Miege. Louisburg was unable to reach the top, and to be honest, no other team in Class 4A will get close – the Stags are just that much better than everyone else.

When Friday's game was done, the 16 Louisburg seniors had to contemplate life without football. No more Friday night lights, no more pregame meals, film sessions are done and grueling practices are only a memory.

Despite the loss, these players should not hang their heads. They should be proud of what they accomplished and look

forward to what is ahead – whatever it may be.

All that stuff seems cliché, I know. But it's true.

It is a team that made a community proud in some of the most difficult circumstances. They showed tremendous character, worked hard and never backed down.

In the end, that is all you can ask.

Top-ranked Bishop Miege ends Louisburg's season



Louisburg senior quarterback Grant Harding tries to find some running room as teammate Korbin Hankinson (31) looks to make a block Friday during the Class 4A Division I sectional game in Louisburg.

The Louisburg High School football team walked off the field at Wildcat Stadium and the disappointment was evident.

Louisburg saw its season come to an end with a 49-6 loss to No. 1 Bishop Miege on Friday in the sectional round of the Class 4A-Division I playoffs. Going into the contest, the Wildcats knew it was going to be difficult to knock the defending state champion Stags off their perch.

Still, the Wildcats were right with Bishop Miege toward the end of the first half as they nearly made it a one score game going into halftime. Louisburg just couldn't slow down Miege's high-powered offense in the second half.

"I'm really proud of these guys," Louisburg co-head coach Gary Griffin said of his team. "We fought our butts off and we didn't quit. Miege is just a really good team."

The Wildcats (8-3) cast some doubt in the outcome late in the second quarter as quarterback Grant Harding found Korbin Hankinson for a 28-yard pass that gave them the ball on the Miege 5-yard line with 5 seconds left before half, down 22-6.

Harding tried to run it in on the next play, but the Stag defense corralled him for just a yard gain.

"Maybe if we get that touchdown in before halftime, we get a little momentum there," Griffin said. "They can just score from anywhere on the field at any time. You try to prevent them from throwing, you give up runs or if you try and stop the run you give up big passes. They are about as well-rounded as it gets."

Louisburg opened the game with a strong first drive as it converted three first downs down to the Miege 33-yard line, before turning the ball over on downs. The Stags scored a minute later when quarterback Carter Putz threw the first of his four touchdown passes for a 5-yard completion to Jafar Armstrong, then converted the 2-point conversion.

The Wildcat defense kept it 8-0 into the second quarter when they forced a Miege fumble on the goal line that was recovered by Thomas San Agustin.



Senior lineman T.J. Dover tries to bring down a Bishop Miege running back Friday at Wildcat Stadium.

Bishop Miege held the Wildcats on their next possession and responded with two touchdown drives that put the Stags up 22-0. Miege's defense also came up big as Landry Weber intercepted Harding twice in the first half to stall Wildcat drives.

Late in the second quarter, Louisburg got a 25-yard run from Harding and a 16-yard run from San Agustin that set up a 7-yard touchdown run from Harding to make it 22-6 after a failed 2-point conversion.

Louisburg's defense responded again as Desmond Doles sacked Putz to force a Miege punt and gave the Wildcats the ball near midfield with 57 seconds left. Harding's long pass to

Hankinson gave the Wildcats some life, but couldn't get the score before time ran out.

"We played hard," Griffin said. "We threw a couple picks in the first half, including one where they scored a couple plays later. I wish we had that back, but you have to take some chances. You can't just let them run over you. They kids really played hard in the first half and I thought they played hard the whole game. Miede is just so explosive and tough to defend."

It was all Miede in the second half as they responded with four touchdowns, including one in which it scored 90 seconds into the third quarter.

The Wildcats were able to move the ball at times on the Stags as they gained 330 yards of offense and Harding led the way with 112 yards on the ground to go along with his touchdown.

After it was over, it was all about reflection for the Wildcat players and coaches. It was a successful season for Louisburg as it snapped a playoff drought and racked up eight wins for the first time since 2012.

The Wildcats also said a final farewell to their senior class of Lyndon Smith, Connor Green, Grant Harding, Thomas San Agustin, Jake Hill, Korbin Hankinson, Jackson Ewalt, Nick Hull, Ben Hupp, Owen Staver, Dalton Frazier, Mason Koechner, Matt Rison, Dustyn Rizzo, T.J. Dover and Tommy Dalton.

"It is a great group of kids to work with," Griffin said. "The senior leadership was excellent. We had our ups and downs, but we played some good football. We held our own and competed hard."

LOU	0	6	0	0 - 6
BM	8	14	13	14 - 49

First quarter:

B: Jafar Armstrong 5 pass from Carter Putz (Putz pass)

Second quarter

B: Cameron Clark 7 run (kick good)

B: Landry Weber 7 pass from Putz (kick good)

L: Grant Harding 7 run (pass failed)

Third quarter

B: Brison Cobbins 5 run (2 pt failed)

B: Armstrong 34 pass from Putz (kick good)

Fourth quarter

B: Weber 66 pass from Putz (kick good)

B: Clark 40 run (kick good)

STATISTICS

OFFENSE

RUSHING – Grant Harding 13-112; Thomas San Agustin 15-58; Austin Moore 9-46; Will Ridley 8-29; Korbin Hankinson 9-28, Jake Hill 7-10.

PASSING – Grant Harding 4-13 47

RECEIVING – Korbin Hankinson 1-28; Dalton Ribordy 1-12; Jake Hill 1-7

DEFENSE

TACKLES – Connor Green 2; Austin Moore 2; Desmond Doles 2; Grant Harding 1; Thomas San Agustin 1; Jake Hill 1; Korbin Hankinson 1; Nick Hull 1; Ben Hupp 1; Dustyn Rizzo 1; T.J. Dover 1.

FUMBLE RECOVERY – Thomas San Agustin

Louisburg hopes to slow high-powered Bishop Miege



Running back Austin Moore gets a handoff from quarterback Grant Harding and waits to get blocks from teammates Jake Hill (24) and Thomas San Agustin (12) last week in Independence. The Wildcats will host Bishop Miege tonight in the Class 4A Division I sectional round of the state playoffs.

On paper, tonight's game with Bishop Miege might seem like a daunting task – but the Louisburg football team isn't looking at it that way.

Sure, the Stags are the No. 1 team in Class 4A-Division I and are considered one of the best teams in the state. They have rolled through the district and regional playoffs, and despite the odds, the Wildcats are excited for the matchup.

“We are looking forward to it,” Louisburg senior Korbin Hankinson said. “They are a tough team and everyone knows they are going to come in ready to go. We will see what happens and we have to come ready to play.”

The Wildcats will host Bishop Miege at 7 p.m., tonight at Wildcat Stadium in the sectional round of the Class 4A Division I state playoffs. Louisburg has turned in its best season in four years as it won its first playoff game since 2012 last week in a 20-0 victory over Independence.

The Stags will be a handful for Louisburg as the Wildcats will try and contain their high-powered offense. Miege quarterback Carter Putz, who has committed to play baseball at Notre Dame, has thrown for more than 2,000 yards on the season and close to 40 touchdowns.

Many of those scores have been to receivers Jafar Armstrong, a Missouri commitment, and Landry Weber. The two Stag receivers each have more than 900 yards receiving on the season and both have 15 touchdowns.

Miege (9-1) also features a freshman running back in Brison Collins, who has more than 600 yards on the ground and has seven touchdowns.

Throughout the playoffs, Miege has outscored its four opponents 222-19, including three shutouts.

“They are very explosive on offense,” Louisburg co-head coach Gary Griffin said. “We need to try to limit those big plays and make them drive the ball. It is great to play at home and we have done well there this year, outside of one game. We need to play our best game and hope for some breaks.”



Linebacker Nick Hull holds an Independence running back by the jersey as lineman Mason Koechner looks to clean up the play during a game last week in Independence.

For the Wildcats offensively, they will try and do their part to keep the Miego offense off the field. Louisburg hopes to put together some long drives and limit the Stags' chances at the endzone.

The Wildcats (8-2) are hoping to get a push from their offensive line of Dalton Frazier, Mason Koechner, T.J. Dover, Dustyn Rizzo and Garrett Lowry, and have their four running backs – Thomas San Agustin, Austin Moore, Jake Hill and Korbin Hankinson – chip away at the Stag defense.

Louisburg also hopes to get some big plays from quarterback Grant Harding, who has connected with Hankinson on several big

pass plays this season.

“Miege is solid everywhere,” Griffin said. “We are hoping that our power game is something that they have not seen a lot of this year. We have more size than they do on their defensive line so we are hoping that we can move them around a little bit, and try to move the chains. We are going to have to make some explosive plays on offense or on special teams and hopefully create some turnovers.”

Wildcats end streak, return home with regional title



The Louisburg Wildcat seniors raise the regional championship trophy following the Wildcats' 20-0 victory over Independence on Friday in Independence. The Wildcats captured their first playoff win since 2012.

INDEPENDENCE – It had been four years since the Louisburg High School football team brought home any kind of plaque.

Playoff wins have been hard to come by for Louisburg as it hasn't won a postseason game since 2012. The Wildcats ended that streak Friday and did it in convincing fashion.

Louisburg shutout Independence 20-0 in Independence to finish as regional champions and the Wildcat players walked off the bus with that all-important plaque to put into the trophy case.

“It means everything to us, especially since we haven’t had one in the four years that I have been here,” Louisburg’s Korbin Hankinson said. “I am a senior, so this was our last time to do it and it is nice to have something in the school that we can always come back and look at and say we did that.”

The Wildcats (8-2) were able to do enough offensively to get the victory, but it was the defense that led the way. Louisburg played with a bend-but-don’t-break attitude as it intercepted two Independence passes.

Louisburg forced the Bulldogs to turn the ball over on downs three different times and also stopped a fake punt try to start the second half.



Louisburg seniors Dustyn Rizzo (left) and Ben Hupp pressure

the Independence quarterback Friday during the Class 4A Division I regional playoff game.

It started up front with the defensive line comprised of seniors T.J. Dover, Matt Rison, Dustyn Rizzo, Ben Hupp and Mason Koechner, along with juniors Dalton Ribordy and Garrett Lowry, as they controlled the line of scrimmage and shut down the Bulldog rushing attack.

“This time of year, I think your defense can win you some ballgames and I thought our defense played as good as it has all year,” Louisburg co-head coach Jeff Lohse said. “Our front four did an outstanding job, and after we made a few changes, we were right there to make plays in the passing game. It was a heck of an effort by them.

“We rely a lot on our front four. We like to take the run game away from teams and make them one-dimensional and that has worked for us.”

The Louisburg front four were able to funnel the Independence running backs to the linebackers and the Wildcats were there to clean it up. Senior linebackers Thomas San Agustin and Nick Hull, along with sophomore Austin Moore, each finished the game with a team-high 11 tackles, while Hankinson and Connor Green each had an interception.

Louisburg picked the perfect time for its defense to come through with a big game as the Wildcat offense struggled to move the ball at times. Independence actually outgained Louisburg 305 to 201 in total offense and the Bulldog defense caused a lot of confusion.



Senior Connor Green goes up for the interception in the second half of Friday's playoff game.

"It was hard to move the ball because you never know when they were going to blitz, and when they did, they did it hard," Louisburg quarterback Grant Harding said. "The stunted almost everything so it was hard to pick them all up."

The Wildcats were able to score in the first quarter when Hankinson dove for the pylon to finish off a 9-yard touchdown

run to put Louisburg up 7-0.

Harding was able to come up with a big play when the Wildcats needed it most right before halftime. A Hankinson interception in the redzone prevented an Independence score late in the second quarter, then Harding connected with Hankinson on a 61-yard touchdown pass with 20 seconds left to make it a two-score game.

“Grant is an excellent quarterback,” Hankinson said. “I have to give it all to him. If he can’t throw a good ball then I can’t catch it. Going into half, you always want to have that momentum so I knew it was going to be a big play. I just wanted to make sure I caught it and make it to the endzone.”

Harding and the Wildcat coaches saw something in the Independence defense that gave them the opportunity to try for the score.

“It was huge,” Harding said of the score. “We ran the same play twice. The first time we tried to hit the tight end across the middle, then we came back and I knew Korbin would be open so we ran it again and I just threw it up and let him catch it.”



Co-head coach Jeff Lohse signals for a touchdown following Grant Harding's 61-yard pass to Korbin Hankinson.

Louisburg's special teams rose to the occasion in the second half as it sniffed out an Independence fake punt to start the third quarter and the Wildcat defense took care of the rest.

Green intercepted a Bulldog pass late in the fourth quarter, which eventually led to the Wildcats' final score of the game – a 3-yard touchdown from San Agustin with 43 seconds left.

"We got the monkey off our back," Lohse said. "For these seniors, this is the first time they have won a playoff game and were able to bring a plaque home, so they are pretty excited."



The Louisburg football team poses for a picture with their regional championship trophy.

So, what is the Wildcats' reward for finally snapping that playoff drought? A date with quite possibly the best football team in the entire state of Kansas.

Louisburg will host the top team in Class 4A Division I – Bishop Miege – at 7 p.m. Friday at Wildcat Stadium. The Stags have rolled through the district and regional playoffs, winning their four games by a combined score of 222-19.

Miege's lone loss of the season came in its season opener against one of the top teams in Class 6A – Blue Valley.

"Everyone knows what we are going to get," Lohse said. "They are probably the best team in the state at any level. I would put them and Blue Valley up there with anyone right now. This time of year you never know what could happen. We will show up on Friday night, we will play our tails off and whatever happens, happens."

Wildcats prepare for dangerous Independence team



Louisburg senior Korbin Hankinson looks for a few extra yards against Paola last week. The Wildcats travel to Independence tonight for their regional playoff game.

As exciting as it was for the Louisburg football team to beat its rival in blowout fashion last week, the Wildcats didn't get a lot of time to celebrate.

The Wildcats' focus went directly to the state playoffs and their first opponent – Independence. Louisburg will travel to Independence tonight for the 7 p.m. kickoff in the Class 4A Division I regional round.

Louisburg (7-2) faces an Independence (8-1) team that has just one loss on the season and the Wildcats know they will have a challenge from the team in Southeast Kansas.

“We have had a very good week of practice leading up this game,” Louisburg co-head coach Jeff Lohse said. “Our team is excited for the challenge ahead of us. We need to grind out first downs on offense and keep them from having big plays when we are on defense. As always, we want to take care of the football and limit our penalties.”

The two teams don't have many common opponents as the Bulldogs have beaten Caney Valley, Fort Scott, Parsons, Anderson

County, El Dorado, Labette County, Field Kindley and Chanute by a combined score of 263-135. Independence's lone defeat came in September in a 46-6 loss to Basehor-Linwood.

Fort Scott is the lone common opponent between the two. Independence defeated the Tigers 14-11 in the second week of the season, while Louisburg downed Fort Scott 35-6 in district play.

The Wildcats have earned their second consecutive trip to the state playoffs, but they are looking for their first win since 2012.

Louisburg has seen several types of offenses throughout the Frontier League and the Wildcats might see a mixture of those tonight. Independence is a threat to both run and throw the ball, and the Wildcat defense, which holds teams to an average of 13 points per game, will have to be on their toes to prevent big plays.

"Indy has a pretty balanced offense," Lohse said. "Their quarterback throws the ball well and their running backs run hard. They have some big boys up front on their offensive line who can move. We are going to have to play disciplined and fast on defense."

However, the Wildcats haven't seen what the Bulldogs bring on the defensive side of the ball. Independence likes to stunt its two inside linebackers, which could cause confusion for the offensive line, but according to Lohse they have been preparing for the different look all week.

"This can create a problem if you aren't prepared for it," he said. "We haven't seen too much like this in the Frontier League, but have been working real hard in practice trying to simulate the different looks we might see tonight."

If the Wildcats survive their test this evening, they will continue to the sectional round of the playoffs and will play

the winner between Bishop Miege and Piper at 7 p.m. next Friday.

Louisburg beats rival Paola to earn playoff berth



Louisburg sophomore Austin Moore gets a block from his offensive line and breaks free for a long gain Friday in Paola. Moore rushed for 122 yards and four touchdowns in the 35-7 over Paola.

PAOLA – It had been five years since the Louisburg football team walked off the field and had anything to celebrate following a game with Paola.

The last five meetings with the Panthers, the Wildcats found themselves on the wrong side of the scoreboard. All that came to an end on Friday.

Louisburg had a lot to celebrate as it rolled Paola 35-7 at Panther Stadium in Paola. Not only did the Wildcats snap the losing streak to the Panthers, but they also earned a spot in the Class 4A, Division I playoffs.

After a loss to Ottawa the week before, the Wildcats had to

win Friday to keep their season alive and they didn't leave much doubt from the opening kickoff.

"You beat Paola and make the playoffs in the same night – that is really big," Louisburg co-head coach Gary Griffin said. "These kids don't want to be done. They have more football in them and they are good bunch of kids. The coaches really like being around them."

Although the Wildcats had to win to get into the playoffs, the contest with Paola was considered a must-win before the season started. Former head coach Kyle Littrell stressed the importance of this game to his players throughout the summer and in practice.

Then when Littrell resigned his post shortly prior to the season, his players wanted to make sure they honored him on the field.

"It feels awesome," senior lineman Mason Koechner said of the win. "Coach Littrell told us before the season started that even if we didn't win a single game all year that he wanted us to win this game. I think we went out there and played the best game we could and we did it for him."



Quarterback Grant Harding waits for a block from teammate Jake Hill to get a few extra yards Friday in Paola.

Louisburg had it going in all phases of the game. The Wildcats racked up 429 yards of total offense and had five rushing touchdowns.

The Wildcat defense also held Paola to 227 yards, had two interceptions and had a shutout going until the final two minutes of the contest. Louisburg also converted on all five of its extra points from Nick Hull on special teams.

“This win feels really good for a lot of reasons,” Griffin said. “That is the best game we have played for four quarters – offensively, defensively and on special teams. We stiffened and made some plays on the goal line and picked off a couple passes. That is what we have been waiting for this team to do this year. Offensively we were pretty efficient as well.”

On a team dominated by seniors, it was sophomore Austin Moore who came through with the biggest performance of the night. Moore carried the ball 15 times for 122 yards and had four touchdowns.

Moore was also all over the field defensively as he led the Wildcats with eight tackles, including two for a loss and had an interception.

“Austin is a gamer,” Griffin said. “He knows he didn’t play very good against Ottawa and he wanted to come out and atone for it. You have to give those touchdowns to the offensive line. They opened some holes for him; he is a hard runner and he made some plays.”



Seniors Dustyn Rizzo (left) and Mason Koechner team up for a tackle.

The offensive line of Koechner, Dustyn Rizzo, Dalton Frazier,

T.J. Dover and Garrett Lowry paved the way for 283 yards on the ground and gave quarterback Grant Harding a lot of time to make some big pass plays down the field.

“The offensive line just made some really big holes, I read the blocks and it was all thanks to them,” Moore said. “I am thankful that I get another week with these seniors. I really enjoy playing with them all and happy that we can keep it going.”

Louisburg (7-2 overall, 2-1 district) made a statement early as the Wildcats drove down the field on the game’s first possession for a touchdown. The Wildcats faced a fourth-down-and-1 near midifield, they went for it and Moore broke free for a 29-yard run that set up a 4-yard touchdown run from Thomas San Agustin.

Right before the end of the first quarter, Harding found Korbin Hankinson for a 65-yard pass that put Louisburg inside the 10-yard line. Moore then scored on a 4-yard touchdown to put Louisburg up 14-0.

Paola took its next possession down the field to try and answer. The Panthers faced a fourth down on the Louisburg 14-yard line, but Moore intercepted the Paola pass to stall the drive.

Moore then responded with a 43-yard run, Harding scrambled for 21 yards and eventually Moore scored on a 3-yard touchdown run to put Louisburg up 21-0 right before halftime.

Harding was a big part of the offense for the Wildcats as he tallied 146 yards through the air and 79 yards on the ground. Hankinson was other end of some of those passes as he caught five balls for 108 yards.

“It is awesome,” Koechner said of the win. “We knew we were one and done and that we had to win this game. We had the best week of practice that we had all year. We were focused and

came out and did it.”

The Panthers used a little trickery to try and get back in the game to start the second half as they went for a fake punt near midfield and converted. Then as Paola looked toward the endzone with a long pass, Hankinson intercepted it to thwart another Panther drive.

Louisburg scored late in the third as Moore scored on a 4-yard run and then scored again on a 6-yard scamper to the endzone to put the Wildcats up 35-0 midway through the fourth quarter.

Now the Wildcats will focus their sights on the playoffs as they hit the road to face Independence at 7 p.m. Friday. Should the Wildcats advance, they will meet the winner between Bishop Miege and Piper.

“If we improve as much next week as we did this week, then we will play a few games,” Griffin said. “We just have to take them one game at a time.”

LOU	7	14	7	7 – 35
PAO	0	0	0	7 – 7

First quarter

L: Thomas San Agustin 4 run (Nick Hull kick)

Second quarter

L: Austin Moore 4 run (Hull kick)

L: Moore 3 run (Hull kick)

Third quarter

L: Moore 4 run (Hull kick)

Fourth quarter

L: Moore 6 run (Hull kick)

P: Donovan Sutti 10 pass from Bryce Huber (kick good)

STATISTICS

OFFENSE

RUSHING – Austin Moore 15-122; Grant Harding 9-79; Thomas San Agustin 10-54; Jake Hill 4-16; Korbin Hankinson 2-8; Will Ridley 2-2; Owen Staver 1-2.

PASSING – Grant Harding 7-11-146

RECEIVING – Korbin Hankinson 5-108, Thomas San Agustin 2-38

DEFENSE

TACKLES – Austin Moore 8, Mason Koechner 6, Matt Rison 5, Thomas San Agustin 4, Dustyn Rizzo 4, Lyndon Smith 3, Connor Green 3, Jake Hill 3, T.J. Dover 3, Grant Harding 2, Nick Hull 2, Ben Hupp 2, Kiefer Tucker 2, Dalton Ribordy 2, Brayden Gage 1, Korbin Hankinson 1, Tommy Dalton 1.

SACKS – Matt Rison 1

INTERCEPTIONS – Austin Moore, Korbin Hankinson