Opinion: Rough patch leads to new beginning



I am just going to come right out and say it, “I’m scared.”

Yeah, it is an unusual way to start out an opinion piece, but there is no two ways around it – I am petrified. But believe it or not, it is what keeps me going.

We have all had at least one point in our existence where our lives changed for better or worse. I have had more than a few of those in my life, but the latest one came on Jan. 9.

It started out like all the other Fridays over the last seven years. I reported to work, spent a few hours in the office getting ready for what was a busy weekend of prep coverage ahead. It was the first action after Christmas break and I was ready to get back into the swing of things.

That never took place.

My bosses came into my office early that afternoon to inform me I was being let go. The job of covering Louisburg athletics was no longer mine. I packed up my things, turned in my key, went home, punched the wall a couple times and cried.

I was scared.

After all the tears came the questions. How was I going to support my family? What am I going to do for a job? The list went on and on and I couldn’t come up with many answers.

As it turned out, one of the worst experiences of my life turned into one of the best.

Thanks to a lot of prayers, and support from family and friends, I decided to start Louisburg Sports Zone. Yep, that’s right, I went from being unemployed to starting my own business for the first time in my life.

Not exactly the best way to alleviate fears.

However, when I kicked off the site just a month later, I was overwhelmed with the amount of support from students at Louisburg High School, employees throughout the district, parents and several others who offered encouragement and supported my new venture.

I finished the last half of the winter season and all of the spring doing what I took for granted the previous seven years. I got the chance to cover Louisburg athletics again.

You know, this whole starting your own business thing might not have been a bad idea after all. I would have never had the courage to go out on my own had I not been pushed in that direction.

Fast forward to the present and I am still alive and kicking, ready to start my eighth season of roaming the Wildcat sidelines with camera in hand, waiting to tell that next story.

This fall brings a lot of story lines to the Wildcat programs. The football team is looking to improve off its 3-win season a year ago and find its way back to the playoffs with a veteran group returning.

Volleyball is primed and ready to make its fourth consecutive state tournament this year after placing in the top four in the last three years. The Lady Cats return five seniors that have a lot of state experience and that bodes well for another

trip to Salina.

The Wildcat soccer team returns an experienced group from a year ago as they try to crack the top of the Frontier League standings. The cross country team also has several returning runners who will try and qualify for the state meet.

There is a lot to be excited about when it comes to Louisburg sports, but for me personally, I am just fortunate enough to still be a part of it in a small way.

I take a lot of pride in what I do and I hope that it shows when you read stories or look at pictures on this site. I started this business knowing that I will never be rich, but it gives me an opportunity to continue to do what I love.

Thanks to all those who have supported me and for the more than 23,000 views on the site in the last six months. I have said it before, but I am extremely blessed to live in a community that supports each other through good times and bad.

Every day I am fortunate enough to be able to go to work and support my family doing what I know how to do. That is all I have ever wanted, so thank you Louisburg for allowing me to do it.

I am still scared, though.

It is that fear that drives me to do the best I can in what I do in my job and in life. I don’t want what happened on that day in January to happen again and I will do everything to make sure it doesn’t.

Right now I am living the good life. I have the opportunity to work for myself, support my family and do what I enjoy. I can’t ask for any more.

I am living the American dream.

I just don’t want to wake up.

Wildcat football wraps up summer workouts



Louisburg lineman Anders Vance breaks through the line in a drill during the Wildcats' team camp in June. The Wildcats finished up their team workouts with a 7-on-7 tournament on July 18.

The season can't get here fast enough for Louisburg football coach Kyle Littrell and this is after a summer filled with camps, weight sessions and other workouts.

Some coaches might want a little break to regroup, but these last two months have left Littrell optimistic about what is it come.

"I really do love this group of players," Littrell said. "We had a really good summer and we got a lot of things accomplished. The chemistry is starting to come together and we have gotten better in a lot of areas. We are more experienced than we have been the last two years and it will show on the field."

Football was on the mind of a lot of players this summer as

they participated in many different activities that began with 7-on-7 workouts every Monday in June. The Wildcat skill players traveled to Paola to work on both sides of the ball against teams from around the area.

“I think what 7-on-7 was gave us a chance to look and see what teams will have coming back like Paola and Spring Hill,” Littrell said. “I know 7-on-7 is a lot about passing and offense, but I really think defensively it helped us out a lot. We developed better communication, especially in the secondary and that is really big for us. Offensively we are obviously not going to throw the ball 30-40 times a game like we do in these drills, but it definitely helped us there as well.”

Those sessions, along with the Louisburg team camp and a scrimmage with Blue Valley Southwest in July, gave Littrell a good look at what is his biggest competition of the offseason – quarterback.

Senior Austin Terry and junior Grant Harding have both gotten plenty of snaps the last two months as both are vying for the starting quarterback job. Both started games last year for the Wildcats, but both have different styles.

Terry is considered to have the more accurate arm, while Harding is better running the ball. The quarterbacks have their pluses and minuses and it has made for a good competition, Littrell said.

“I challenged both guys to improve in different areas before the summer started,” he said. “I wanted Austin to try and be more of a physical runner and I wanted Grant to be a little more accurate throwing the ball. Both guys have done a great job of improving in both areas. They have taken coaching and instruction really well and both are fighters and that is what you want out of your starting quarterback.

“I kind of have an idea of who I want the starter to be, but I

am not quite sure yet. When it comes down to it, I need to sit back and figure out how to get the best 11 guys on the field."

Whoever the quarterback is, Littrell knows they are going to have a large offensive line protecting him. He saw a lot of positives from his front five, including their work in a scrimmage with Blue Valley Southwest on July 17.

Both teams participated in the full pad scrimmage that featured light tackling, however the Louisburg coach was pleased with what he got out of his offensive and defensive lines.

"I thought the scrimmage was really good for both teams and we did some nice things," Littrell said. "Defensively, we had a rough day and we didn't communicate well and we fell asleep on a lot of counters and sweeps. But I thought we really did a nice job in-between the tackles of stopping the run.

"Our line is going to be bigger than we have seen here in a really long time. Bigger doesn't always mean better, but these guys have improved and I look forward to seeing them improve even more as the season gets closer."

The Wildcats concluded their summer the next day at the Blue Valley Midsummer Classic 7-on-7 tournament and represented well. Louisburg was the smallest school of the 14 teams in attendance.

Louisburg finished with a 3-3-2 record and Littrell noticed a trend on a couple of their defeats.

"I really thought our guys competed well for the most part and we beat some decent teams, but two of our three losses were after we sat out for a break, which told me that we didn't do a good job of staying focused," he said. "So after that second one, I talked to them about it and we go out and beat St. James 20-0 in our next one so I think the message got across and it was a good learning experience for our guys."

The Wildcats won’t have to wait long before they take the field again as the first day of practice begins Aug. 17 and the first game will be Sept. 4 when the Wildcats host Ottawa.

- **BENEFIT POKER TOURNAMENT**: Friends of the Louisburg High School football program will be hosting a benefit dinner and Texas Hold’Em Poker Tournament at 5 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 22 at the American Legion in Louisburg. The poker tournament begins at 6:30 p.m. and all proceeds will benefit the Louisburg High School football program.

Wildcat football improves at camp



Louisburg football coach Kyle Littrell works with the linebackers during a drill Friday on the final day of the team camp at Louisburg High School. The Wildcats are working to improve off their three-win season a year ago.

The 2014 campaign left a bad taste in the mouths of a lot of Louisburg football players and coaches.

Louisburg won three games a season ago and were on the wrong end of several close games. Since the beginning of summer break, the Wildcats have been working hard to get rid of those memories.

The Wildcats, under head coach Kyle Littrell, concluded their week-long team camp Friday at Louisburg High School and have put 2014 in their rearview mirror.

“I see a team that is ready to come out of their shells,” Littrell said. “We have been considered young and inexperienced but now we are one of the big boys. We probably have the most experience coming back in the league. We are bigger across both lines and we have speed, so why shouldn’t we be better? Our pieces have to come together and if that happens I really think we can have a good year.”

The players hit the practice field around 6:30 p.m. every day last week and worked out for two-and-half hours improving on a variety of different aspects. Littrell said his group was able to get in 80 to 90 percent of their offense



Quarterback Austin Terry hands off to a Wildcat running back Friday during the team’s final day of camp.

Defensively, the Wildcats were able to put in their base package and should give them a head start come August and the first day of practice. However, the work load doesn't stop with camp.

"There is a lot asked of the kids and they have a lot going on with all the other different sports and activities," Littrell said. "I know it is asking a lot, but I want them to come in for an hour every Monday just so we can keep what we learned at camp fresh in our minds so we don't have to go over it again come practice. I think they have responded well to that and will really help us."

Players also have the opportunity to hit the weight room a couple times a week and are currently participating in 7-on-7 workouts in Paola every Monday in June. The Wildcats will conclude their summer workouts on July 17 when they will host Blue Valley Southwest in a controlled scrimmage.

Louisburg hopes to have a special season this time around as the Wildcats return 15 starters on both sides of the ball and should have depth at several positions, including quarterback. Senior Austin Terry and junior Grant Harding are both competing for the starting spot and both saw significant varsity time a season ago.

The Wildcats also return most of their offensive and defensive lines and Littrell hopes those players, along with a couple newcomers, can give Louisburg the physical front it is looking for.

"We were able to accomplish a lot during camp and I was really pleased with the whole week," Littrell said. "I think they were a little worn down Friday and we were making a lot of mistakes, but that really doesn't take away what we were able to do. I was really happy to see that."

The players may have been tired, but the players' moms were full strength and ready to go. To end the camp, Littrell

invited all the of the players moms to take part in a little mini-camp.

All of the moms went through warm-ups and then took part in the position drills. Each mother played the position of her son.



Janie Dunn shows her son, Alex, how hard she can hit during the mom's portion of the camp Friday evening.

"The only time I took part in a mom football camp was when I coached at Shawnee Mission South in 2000 and that time it was a 3-day camp," Littrell said. "I didn't want to step out that far yet, but I thought it would be a good thing to have the moms come out for an evening and learn what all their sons do and what their responsibilities are.

"I also wanted them to know that we care about their kids and that we want them to be successful. I think for the most part it is just to give them a first-hand look at what their sons go through and what a normal practice might look like. Overall I thought it went really well."

Summer camp information

Summer camps at Louisburg High School aren’t too far away and here is some information if you are interested in signing up.

FOOTBALL

LHS football coach Kyle Littrell is holding his team camp on June 15 through 19 on the team’s practice field just outside the high school. The cost for the high school camp is $45 and includes insurance, a T-shirt and shorts.

Littrell will also conduct a middle school and elementary school camp. The seventh and eighth-grade camp will run from 10 a.m. to noon on June 15 through 18 and will cost $35. There will also be an elementary camp from 8:30 to 10 a.m. on June 15-17 for grades 3-6 and will cost $25. Both camp fees include a T-shirts.

For more information, contact Littrell at 837-1720 or littrellk@usd416.org.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Head boys basketball coach Jason Nelson is conducting his team camp from 2 to 4:30 p.m. on June 8 through 12 in the LHS gymnasium. The cost for the high school camp is $50 and includes a T-shirt.

Nelson will also hold a junior high and elementary school camp as well. The session for sixth through eighth-grade will run from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on June 8 through 11 and the cost

is $45. The third through fifth-grade camp will run from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on June 8 through 10 and is $40. Both camps include a T-shirt.

All three camps will have a heavy emphasis on fundamentals. The due date to sign up is May 23. For more information, contact Nelson at (913) 963-8421 or nelsonj@usd416.org.

VOLLEYBALL

LHS head volleyball coach Jessica Compliment will hold camps from fifth-grade on up through high school this July.

On July 13 through 17, Compliment will conduct the high school camp from 1 to 4 p.m. and the cost is $45. The seventh and eighth-grade camp will run from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on July 13 through 16 and costs $35. The fifth and sixth-grade session will go from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. on July 13 through 15 and costs $30.

Deadline to sign-up for the camps is May 15 and all costs include a camp T-shirt. For more information, contact Compliment at (785) 766-3758 or complimentj@usd416.org.

WRESTLING

LHS head wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird will conduct a beginners and advanced camp on June 22 through June 25 in the LHS gymnasium

The beginners camp is for novice and youth wrestlers and will run from 5 to 7 p.m. each day. The minimum age is 6-years-old. Children who will be in kindergarten or first grade must have adult supervision.

The advanced camp will run from 7 to 9:15 p.m. for high

school, middle school and experienced youth wrestlers. The cost for both camps is $35 and includes a T-shirt. Deadline to register is June 1.

For more information, contact Bovaird at (913) 424-0999 or bovairdr@usd416.org

GIRLS SOCCER

The LHS girls soccer program will prepare for its inaugural season this summer. Head coach Kyle Conley is holding a high school camp from 10 a.m. to noon on June 15 through 19 along with assistant coach Michael Pickman.

The cost for the camp is $40, which includes a T-shirt. Campers will need to bring shin-guards and a water bottle. Deadline to sign-up is May 15. For more information contact Conley at conleyk@usd416.org.

BOYS SOCCER

Head coach Ben York will be conducting his high school team camp on July 13 through 17. The cost for the camp is $50. For more information, contact York at benyork13@gmail.com.

Blancarte inks with Fort Scott



Louisburg senior Nick Blancarte signs his letter of intent to play football for Fort Scott Community College on Feb. 4. Sitting next to Nick are his parents Christina and Matt Blancarte. Standing (from left) is Louisburg assistant football coach Gary Griffin, head coach Kyle Littrell and assistant Robert Ebenstein.

A lot of Louisburg football fans might not have heard the name Nick Blancarte before the season, but after it was over, everyone knew who Blancarte was, including Fort Scott Community College.

Blancarte signed his letter of intent to play football for Fort Scott on Feb. 4 at Louisburg High School and the Louisburg senior is ready to get his college career started.

“I am extremely excited to sign with Fort Scott,” Blancarte said. “I think it will be a good place to further my football career and my education. I really got along with all the coaches there well and they made me feel that this was the place for me. It was a good fit.”

The coaches see Blancarte fitting in as a safety in the Greyhounds’ secondary, a position he has played since middle school.

“Nick was a really good addition to our football team this year,” Louisburg coach Kyle Littrell said. “Safety is a position where I think he can flourish at. Nick has good

speed, toughness and a mind for the game. I think what sets Nick apart is his desire to get better and his attention to detail when watching/studying film.

“Nick is a natural leader who has the ability to hold himself and his teammates to a higher standard. Fort Scott is going to love what they get from him. As long as Nick tackles the ball carrier and not just the ball, he will be just fine.”

He may have only spent a year at Louisburg, but Blancarte certainly made his impact on the Wildcat football team.

As the team starting safety, Blancarte, a transfer from Mill Valley High School, made big play after big play in the Louisburg secondary and quickly become one of the go-to players on defense.

Blancarte finished the season as the Wildcats’ lone first team selection on the all-Frontier League team as an all-league defensive back. He finished the season second on the team in tackles with 67, had six tackles for a loss to go along with three interceptions. He led the team with 29 solo tackles.

He also made several ferocious hits on the year on defense and even on special teams.

“I definitely like making those big hits, especially early in the game,” Blancarte said. “I think it really sets the tone for the game and it lets the opponent know you are there and it sends a message.”

Blancarte has set a goal for himself to play football beyond his two years at Fort Scott, but he knows it won’t be easy.

“I don’t want to say that I am going to play Division I or Division II football because I know it will be a challenge,” Blancarte said. “I know it is going to take a lot of hard work and preparation for that kind of next step, but I am looking forward to trying.”

Joining Blancarte at Fort Scott will be teammate Brenton Wrigley, who was also a big part of the Louisburg defense. Once Blancarte and the rest of the Fort Scott signees report in the fall, the coaches will work them into the program by getting them in shape.

“What both players have to realize that the first three weeks, they are trying to run off the kids who really don’t want to be there,” Littrell said. “When they make it through that three-week period, both will know that they have accomplished something special. I wish the best of luck to both of these fine young gentlemen.”

Nick is the son of Matt and Christina Blancarte.

Wrigley signs with Fort Scott



Louisburg High School senior Brenton Wrigley signed his letter of intent Wednesday to play football at Fort Scott Community College. Sitting next to Brenton are his parents Ryan and Krista Wrigley. Standing is Louisburg assistant football coach Gary Griffin, head coach Kyle Littrell and assistant Robert Ebenstein.

Each year Brenton Wrigley got better and better for the Louisburg High School football team.

Now that his high school career is over, Wrigley hopes to continue that progression to the collegiate ranks. Wrigley, a senior, made it official Wednesday when he signed his letter of intent to play football for Fort Scott Community College.

Wrigley, who played on the offensive line and was a middle linebacker for Louisburg, is ready for the opportunity that has been placed in front of him.

“I am very excited to further my education and football career at the next level,” Wrigley said. “Fort Scott is a small town just like Louisburg, which is the kind of area I like and their staff and coaches seemed like a nice fit for me.”

Wrigley was all over the field for the Wildcats this past season, especially on the defensive end. He led the Wildcats with 68 tackles, with four for a loss and added 2.5 sacks.

He also earned all-Frontier League second team honors for his play in the middle of the Louisburg defense.

“Brenton is a kid who in the four years in the program has probably improved more than any kid I have ever coached,” Louisburg coach Kyle Littrell said. “Brenton’s work ethic is relentless and he has the right attitude to go with it. Each and every year Brenton played for us, you could see that he spent a lot of time working on his techniques and strength to be able to perform at a high level.”

That work ethic is what Wrigley hopes will put him on the playing field at Fort Scott. Not only did the Fort Scott coaches recruit him to play linebacker, they would also like to see him be a long-snapper as well a position he also played for the Wildcats.

“It is very exciting to be able to long-snap in college,”

Wrigley said. “I have done it since I was a little kid.”

Joining Wrigley at Fort Scott will be teammate Nick Blancarte, who was also a big part of the Louisburg defense. Once Wrigley and the rest of the Fort Scott signees report in the fall, the coaches will work them into the program by getting them in shape.

“What both players have to realize that the first three weeks, they are trying to run off the kids who really don’t want to be there,” Littrell said. “When they make it through that three-week period, both will know that they have accomplished something special. I wish the best of luck to both of these fine young gentlemen.”

Along with football Wrigley will be majoring in finance and business administration. Brenton is the son of Ryan and Krista Wrigley.