

Louisburg hopes for big season in just second year



Louisburg junior Bailey Belcher (right) returns to help lead the Wildcat girls soccer team after scoring a team-high 33 goals last season. Louisburg opens their season Thursday at Tonganoxie.

It was a year no one associated with Louisburg High School girls soccer will soon forget.

In their inaugural season in 2016, all the Wildcats did was finish the season with 14 wins, a regional championship and a spot in the state quarterfinals.

The bar was set high from the start for Louisburg, but instead of settling, the Wildcats want to raise it even higher for the 2017 campaign.

“Last year’s team exceeded everyone’s standards,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “It was such an unbelievable ride. Last year’s team set a standard for us and an expectation. We now know that we are more than capable of achieving amazing things. At the same time, now there are those expectations so we will have some pressure to fulfill them.

“Last season did give the girls an idea of what a team can achieve and I could not be prouder of that life lesson. I also feel that everyone is focused on a common goal.”

The journey to achieve that goal begins Thursday when the Wildcats travel to Tonganoxie for their season opener. Louisburg will have an experienced look moving forward for a program that is just in its second season.

Louisburg, which lost just three seniors from a year ago, return eight starters and features a deeper bench. Although the Wildcats do have a veteran look, they have added 14 new players to the program.



Louisburg senior Bryn O'Meara (pictured) was named team captain along with fellow senior Madisen Simpson and junior Bailey Belcher.

"We did lose three fantastic young ladies (Maddie McDaniel, Rylee Bergh and Lilly Scott) and they left some difficult shoes to fill, but we are returning nearly everyone from last year's team," Conley said. "The hope is that with the returners and new players we should be able to handle their absence. By having so many returners it also allows us to have a little bit of familiarity with what we are trying to achieve in this program. It also allows the returners to be leaders and help teach the newcomers and/or freshmen.

"It is amazing to see that many newcomers. We have 10 freshman, two sophomores and two juniors come out for the team. The girls really have gelled well and are continuing to grow as they become more familiar with my standards and expectations. I could not be prouder of how these young ladies have bought in and work their tails off."

One of those returners is junior Bailey Belcher, who along with seniors Bryn O'Meara and Madisen Simpson, were recently named team captains. Belcher set a high bar herself a year ago as she scored a team-high 33 goals from the midfield position and will be a big scoring option again after earning first team all-league and all-state honors last season.

Joining Belcher in the midfield will be a rotation of sophomore Hayli Detherage, Simpson, senior Lily Cook, freshman Hannah Straub, freshman Trinity Moore and sophomore Hallie Hutsell. Senior Quincy Rice, junior Savannah Reinhart and freshman Mackenzie Scholtz will all play up top at the forward spot.

"I feel that Bailey is going to have another incredible year," Conley said. "It might not be as glorious as the 33 goals that she scored last year, but I think she will be just as

effective. She is moving into a new role as well so it will take some time for her to adjust. I feel that she will be a threat that teams are going to have to respect.

“Toward the end of the season, she was double teamed every time she touched it so it will be no different for her this year. I actually think this will allow her to show the other aspects of her game and that she is a complete player by finding the open girls and allowing them to take advantage of the space provided.”



Sophomore Camdyn Clark, an all-league and all-state player a year ago, hopes to help lead the Wildcat defense.

The Wildcats also return an experienced defense and that starts with goalie Shay Whiting. The Louisburg junior earned second team all-league and all-state honors a year ago with

eight shutouts and 86 saves.

Also returning is sophomore Camdyn Clark, who was also a second-team player on the all-state and all-league teams for her role as an outside back. O'Meara and Clark will play on the outside again this season and will be joined by a rotation of junior Georgia Wilde, freshman Avery O'Meara, sophomore Bria Jensen and sophomore Kaitlyn Lewer.

Lewer will replace Bergh at the center back position this season. Bergh, who was a first-team all-league and second team all-state player as a senior last year, left a big void in the Wildcat defense but Conley believes Lewer can do the job.

"Rylee may be the most difficult to replace from last year's team," Conley said. "She was a leader and played at such a high work rate. We are looking for a variety of options to fill her role and injuries have made it difficult, but I am anticipating Kaitlyn to fill the void that Rylee left. She is just as aggressive and has quite a bit of pace as well. I am excited to see how the back line adjusts and grows throughout the year. Their communication and chemistry might be the most important on our team.

"The whole team is much faster and athletic this year believe it or not. I think that will allow us to play at an even higher level. It will also be interesting to see how our back four come together as well. I want them to become even more engaged in the attack and my expectations for the returning outside backs (Bryn and Camdyn) is extremely high. I feel that they are going to be able to play at a higher level than they did last year."

After Thursday's game with Tonganoxie, the Wildcats will have a week off for spring break and then have their home opener at 6 p.m. on March 28 against reigning Frontier League champion, De Soto.

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.

Henry joins Baker women's soccer team



Michelle Henry, a 2015 Louisburg High School graduate, is ready to give college soccer a try this fall as she signed with Baker University last semester.

Michelle Henry made her peace with leaving behind the sport she loved since she was a little girl.

Soccer was always a big part of her life, but she had just graduated high school and was ready to make school a priority. She enrolled at Pittsburg State and everything was in place for her collegiate future.

Or so she thought.

After a month on the Pitt State campus, Henry began to hear that sport begin to call back to her. It was a call she couldn't ignore.

"I really struggled with the decision on whether I wanted to play soccer or not," Henry said. "I went with Pitt because I just wanted to focus on academics and I didn't want soccer to conflict with my schooling. Once I got there, and after a couple months, I realized I missed soccer way too much. I wasn't ready to give up yet."

So as Henry looked into different possibilities, she didn't have to travel very far to find that perfect fit.

Henry got in contact with Baker University head coach Davy Phillips, a school she was originally considering out of high school. A few weeks later, the 2015 Louisburg High School graduate was officially a member of the Wildcat women's soccer program.

"I started to look into Baker and they were a really good school and soccer team," Henry said. "I reached out to the coach. I practiced with the girls and it went from there. After talking with their coach, he told me that school is first and soccer is second. He let me know that school is the most important and soccer is something you get to do while you are here and that is really what I was looking for. It was a perfect fit for me."

Henry transferred from Pitt at the end of her first semester and enrolled at Baker for the second semester early this year as she earned both an athletic and academic scholarship. Since that time, she has been taking part in offseason workouts with her future teammates and has found herself in a new role.

Normally playing in the midfield, the Baker coaches moved Henry to the forward spot – a position she has grown to like.

“(Phillips) likes those players up top to be his faster players,” Henry said. “That is where I am at right now. I actually like it a lot. I am used to always dropping back all the time in the midifield to help defend, and when you are a forward you don’t do that as much so it is taking some getting used to.”

Playing in high school definitely prepared Henry for the college level as she competed on the boys soccer team, since the girls squad wasn’t formed yet. The experience seemed to make Henry an even stronger player as she earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors her senior season after garnering a starting position.

“I liked being able to start on the coed team, but it would have been awesome to start on the first-ever girls soccer team,” she said. “It is better late than never and I made it to quite a few games and it was fun to watch. I still felt like I was a little part of it.

“I think playing on the boys team made me a better player though. It is a different type of game because we are built different so it forced me to not let myself get pushed around. It helped me stand my ground and be quicker.”

Henry hopes to take that attitude into the first day of practice with her new Baker teammates as they prepare for the upcoming fall season.

“There are a lot of good girls out there,” Henry said. “I have

been working hard all summer because I have been out of soccer for a year and they haven't, so I am having to keep up and get to a level where I can compete for a starting position or be contributing. I just want to go play."

Wildcats beat the heat, get better at camp



The Louisburg girls soccer team ended its team camp last Friday with an intrasquad scrimmage. The Wildcats not only competed against themselves, but against the heat as well as temperatures reached close to 100 degrees later in the week.

Coming off a 14-win season that ended in a regional championship in the program's first year, the Louisburg girls soccer team took to the field less than one month following the end of its season.

With temperatures and the heat index soaring close to 100 degrees, the Wildcats battled through the tough elements during their week-long team camp that ended last Friday. The Wildcat players gathered every morning for two hours working to refine their game.

Of course, the success they had last season made the heat a little more bearable.

“The heat was a problem for us, but we have tough kids that work hard and are focused on getting better,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We have twice as many water breaks as usual, but we were able to overcome it. Our program will never makes excuses. It was just another obstacle that we need to overcome and I feel we did fine with that.”

Approximately 24 players attended camp each day and close to 30 have reported for summer workouts. The Wildcats also added eight freshman players to the mix, which could give them more depth next season.



Louisburg coach Kyle Conley looks on as the team started its scrimmage last Friday.

Although he wanted to stress fundamentals and conditioning, Conley also wanted to develop chemistry among the team. Louisburg lost three seniors off of last season’s squad and he hopes to see different players step up as leaders.

“I felt camp went pretty well,” Conley said. “With eight

incoming freshmen, we needed to expand on our team chemistry. The girls had some issues with filling the void of (seniors Maddie) McDaniel, (Lilly) Scott and (Rylee) Bergh in regards to leadership. We worked that out and allowed the girls to discover how practice was going to be and expectations for our program.

“I was very pleased with the dedication that the freshmen had in attending their first high school soccer summer. They consistently showed up ready to work. I was very pleased with the upperclassman and their focus to get better. Leadership isn’t always the one who does all the talking. I was very pleased with how my leaders led by example and supported and helped the freshmen within drills and training sessions.”

This camp was much different than the last one the Wildcats took part in a year ago. Back then, they were trying to get to know one another and prepare for their inaugural season.

Fast forward to this summer, the Wildcats are coming off a spot in the state quarterfinals and thoughts on the program have changed dramatically.



Bria Jensen makes a pass during the team’s scrimmage Friday.

“Last year we focused on the building blocks of playing

soccer, but this year the bar has been set and we are expanding more on our tactical and technical aspects of the game,” Conley said. “We are expecting to keep improving our style of play. This camp and summer has been vastly different because of the expectations that our team has created for ourselves. It is a very exciting time for Louisburg girls soccer.”

It has been a busy time for the entire team as it hasn’t had much time to relax. Louisburg will continue its team workouts over the summer, along with weight sessions.

Several Wildcats won’t take much of a break at all as they will continue playing with their respective club teams. Still, Conley believes he was able to accomplish a lot during the team camp.

“We were looking to improve technically, formations, movement off the ball and communication,” Conley said. “Those are four of the aspects that I feel we needed to improve on and they were our focus. I am very pleased with how we are developing, but we will have our work cut out for us. We need to increase our speed of play as well. I am excited to watch this team to continue to grow.”

Five Wildcats placed on all-state soccer team



Louisburg senior defender Rylee Bergh clears the ball away during a game earlier this season. Bergh and four other Wildcats were named to the Class 4-1A all-state team. Bergh and sophomore Bailey Belcher earned first-team honors.

Coming off a successful first season, the Louisburg High School girls soccer team was already well-recognized on the regional level with nine all-Frontier League selections.

As it turned out, many of those same players were named to the all-state team that was released last week. Louisburg earned five spots on the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association all-state team.

Senior Rylee Bergh (defender) and sophomore Bailey Belcher (midfielder) were named to the Class 4-1A first team, while senior Maddie McDaniel (midfield), sophomore Shay Whiting (goalkeeper) and freshman Camdyn Clark (defender) were selected to the all-state second team.



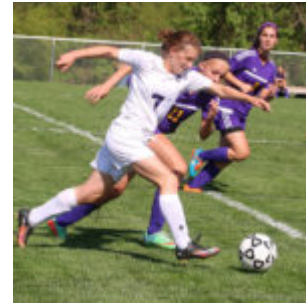
Bailey Belcher, first team, midfield



Maddie McDaniel, second team, midifield



Shay Whiting, second team,
goalkeeper



Camdyn Clark, second team,
defender

“I think it is a fantastic honor to have our kids honored by other coaches within the 4A-1A class,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “These kids, as well as their teammates, bought into our system of play and gave this town, the high school and the coaches everything that they had each and every night. I couldn’t be more proud of these young ladies.

“None of these accolades could not have been accomplished without their teammates. I think this is just the icing on the cake on how fantastic this season was for our 2016 girls soccer team. These young ladies are a great example of our program and how we want our program to be thought of.”

The Wildcats had a strong defense all season, which was a big reason for their 14-4-1 season and why they had three of those players selected to the all-state team. Bergh, the team’s centerback, led the way and limited several scoring opportunities.

With the help of Bergh, Clark and the other Wildcat defenders, Whiting was credited with eight shutouts on the season.

Belcher was one of the top scorers in the Frontier League this season as she finished with 33 goals to go along with four assists from the midfield spot. As for McDaniel, she was second on the team in scoring nine goals, but also had a team-high 13 assists.

Wildcat girls soccer earns nine spots on all-league



Louisburg sophomore Bailey Belcher scorched the net this season as she finished with a team-high 33 goals and added four assists to earn first team all-Frontier League honors. The Wildcats earned nine spots on the team overall.

The Louisburg High School girls soccer team made quite an impression on the rest of the Frontier League in its first year.

Louisburg racked up 14 wins, won a regional title and advanced to the state quarterfinals in the Lady Cats' inaugural season. It was quite the feat and the league coaches made sure Louisburg was recognized for it.

The Lady Cats were awarded with nine selections on the all-league team that was released last week. Sophomore Bailey Belcher, along with seniors Maddie McDaniel and Rylee Bergh, led the way as each earned first team honors.

Junior Madisen Simpson, junior Shay Whiting (goalie), sophomore Georgia Wilde and freshman Camdyn Clark were named to the second team. Senior Lilly Scott and sophomore Izzie Ford were selected as honorable mentions.

“I was extremely happy with how the league viewed our girls,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “Of course I always feel we could have had more kids, but I am thankful for the honors that these young ladies received. These girls worked their tails off.”



Center back Rylee Bergh was named first team all-league as she led the Wildcat defense.

Belcher was one of the top scorers in the Frontier League this season as she finished with 33 goals to go along with four assists from the midfield spot. Also when team awards were announced following the season, she was named as the team’s Most Outstanding Player and earned the Golden Boot award for the most goals.

“Bailey had an exceptional year,” Conley said. “I don’t envision that record of 33 goals getting broken any time soon.”

As for McDaniel, the Louisburg senior ended the season with nine goals and led the Lady Cats with 13 assists. She was also named as the team’s Offensive Most Valuable Player.



Maddie McDaniel recorded nine goals and 13 assists to earn first team all-league honors.

“Maddie was a great leader on our team,” Conley said. “She was an individual who knew how to keep things light at practice, but also knew when it was time to work.”

Bergh was the Lady Cats’ leader on the defensive side as she helped post eight shutouts from the center back position and kept Louisburg’s defense organized. Bergh was also awarded the team’s Defensive MVP honor following the season.

“Rylee was an awesome center back and saved us countless times back there,” Conley said. “She was aggressive and relentless in the back. She was a major reason why we were able to post eight shutouts and a 1.06 goals against average.”

Simpson played well at the midfield spot, and while she wasn’t on the attack much, she finished with one goal and two assists.

As a first-year goalie, Whiting left quite the mark as she posted eight shutouts and also had 86 saves on the year.

Clark and Wilde were key parts to the Wildcat defense as they helped out Bergh and Whiting from the outside back positions. Clark was also named the team’s Freshman of the Year and added

four goals, while Wilde also finished with one goal.



Shay Whiting, goalie,
second team



Madisen Simpson, second
team



Georgia Wilde, second team



Camdyn Clark, second team



Lilly Scott, honorable
mention



Izzie Ford, honorable
mention

Before her season was halted to an injury, Ford was among the team leaders in goals scored, but still added six goals and five assists on the season from the forward position.

As for Scott, she finished with two goals and two assists. She was also given the Wildcat Award at the end of the year, which is for the best leader and attitude on the team.

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE GIRLS SOCCER

First team

Mikayla Smith, Spring Hill, senior

Tarah Phongsavath, De Soto, junior

Bailey Belcher, Louisburg, sophomore

Tanith Beal, De Soto, junior

Bailey Billings, De Soto, senior

Hailey Jones, Spring Hill, senior

Madison Plake, De Soto, junior

Maddie McDaniel, Louisburg, senior

Rylee Bergh, Louisburg, senior

Erica Petry, Baldwin, senior

Goalie: Taylor Rogers, De Soto, sophomore

Second team

Alyssa Hargrove, De Soto, junior

Madisen Simpson, Louisburg, junior

Emily Girrens, Spring Hill, senior

Sara Watson, Spring Hill, sophomore

Carmen Rush, De Soto, junior

Caitlin Countryman, Baldwin, freshman

Madeline Keleher, De Soto, senior

Georgia Wilde, Louisburg, sophomore

Isabel Tiller, Baldwin, freshman

Camdyn Clark, Louisburg, freshman

Goalie: Shay Whiting, Louisburg, sophomore

Honorable mention

Olivia Young, De Soto, senior

Amanda Wray, Ottawa, sophomore

Izzie Ford, Louisburg, sophomore

Megann Lawrenz, Baldwin, senior

Lilly Scott, Louisburg, senior

Chloe Brown, Ottawa, senior

Goalie: Mallory Fredricks, Ottawa, senior

McDaniel to start new soccer journey at Allen



Louisburg High School senior Maddie McDaniel recently signed

her letter of intent to play soccer for Allen Community College next season. Sitting next to Maddie are her parents Ian and Angie McDaniel. Standing (from left) is LHS assistant coach Michael Pickman and head coach Kyle Conley.

Soccer has always been a part of Maddie McDaniel's life.

She played it when she was a little kid, all the way up through high school as a member of the first senior class on the inaugural Louisburg girls soccer team.

Even though her high school career is finished, McDaniel doesn't want to leave soccer behind just yet.

McDaniel recently signed her letter of intent to play soccer for Allen Community College in Iola and is ready to take the next step in her life.

"It is pretty exciting since I have always played soccer and I knew since I was in middle school that I wanted to play soccer in college," McDaniel said. "It is a small school and it is a community college so I only have to go two years and I can maybe try and go to a bigger school. They even take you to showcases so that four-year colleges can look at us and hopefully move on. They are just like a family there too and that is the way they play."



Louisburg's Maddie McDaniel (left) will trade in her Louisburg uniform for an Allen County one next season.

Playing in college wasn't always a certainty for McDaniel, who has played club ball since her freshman year in high school. She had given up on the idea early on in high school, but her interest was rejuvenated after taking part in a tryout.

"I kind of got away from it a little bit, but then during one of my college showcases I had four college coaches come up to me and said they wanted me to play for them," McDaniel said. "That was awesome, so I started to look more."

McDaniel didn't have to look far as she had interest from several smaller area schools, but Allen stood out among the rest. Two years ago, the Red Devils finished with a 13-4-2 record and were ranked in the top 20 in the nation under head coach Jeremy McGinnis.

Allen was 9-10 a season ago, but McDaniel is excited to help the Red Devils back toward the top.

"I think they are really good," McDaniel said of the program. "The coach is fantastic and he really knows what he is doing. They have told me that he sees me as more of an attacking forward or attacking midfielder. He just wants me to make passes and score a lot of goals."

This season with Louisburg, McDaniel made quite the impression with the first-year program. She helped the Wildcats to a regional title and a 14-4-1 record.

McDaniel finished the season with nine goals and 13 assists as a midfielder and was one of the team captains.

"That is fantastic to have someone to sign to further their

playing career,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “She was so influential to get girls soccer to LHS and then to have her sign to play at Allen County is just surreal. I could not be prouder of her. She is raising the bar of our program. It couldn’t happen to a better young lady.”

All-Frontier League Girls Soccer Team

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE GIRLS SOCCER

First team

Mikayla Smith, Spring Hill, senior

Tarah Phongsavath, De Soto, junior

Bailey Belcher, Louisburg, sophomore

Tanith Beal, De Soto, junior

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Honorable mention

Olivia Young, De Soto, senior

Amanda Wray, Ottawa, sophomore

Izzie Ford, Louisburg, sophomore

Megann Lawrenz, Baldwin, senior

Lilly Scott, Louisburg, senior

Chloe Brown, Ottawa, senior

Goalie: Mallory Fredricks, Ottawa, senior

Wildcats' special season comes to a close



Louisburg senior Rylee Bergh tries to beat a De Soto defender for a 50-50 ball during the Wildcats' state quarterfinal match May 24 in Louisburg. The Wildcats came up short against De Soto in a 3-1 loss, but finished their season with a 14-4-1 record.

Following the final buzzer, this year's version of the Louisburg High School girls soccer team huddled together for the final time.

Some players had tears in their eyes, others left the field with their heads down. Their journey was over.

Their inaugural season was complete after a 3-1 loss to De Soto in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinal round on May 24 in Louisburg. It wasn't the way they wanted to see their season come to a close.

"It is going to sting for a while," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "Ultimately, though, there is only one team that isn't crying at the end of the year."

De Soto, which split with Louisburg this season, came out on a

mission and scored three goals in the first 25 minutes of the match and the Wildcats quickly found themselves in a big hole.

The Wildcats weren't the same team that beat De Soto two weeks prior and it took them a little while to get into a rhythm.

"The first 20 minutes or so we just played scared," Conley said. "Unfortunately, that 20 minutes determined the game. It stinks because we have played so hard and free all year. Maybe it is my fault for meeting with them before the game and talking with them more about this than any of the others, I don't know. We just played nervous, afraid and played not to make mistakes instead of playing free."



Georgia Wilde tries to console teammate Bailey Belcher (4) while Maddie McDaniel (right) tries to do the same to Madisen Simpson following the Wildcats' loss on May 24 in the Class 4-1A state quarterfinals.

With every De Soto goal, however, the Wildcats played a little looser and it finally ended up with a goal of their own.

A minute following De Soto's third goal, Louisburg answered.

Sophomore Bailey Belcher took a shot on goal – the shot bounced off the goalie and junior Lilly Cook was there for the rebound and cut the De Soto lead to 3-1.

The Wildcats had a couple other shots on goal late in the first half to creep even closer, but couldn't find the back of the net.

“After that first 20 minutes it was a back and forth game,” Conley said. “It really wasn't dominated by either team. It wasn't pretty soccer, but it was what it was and almost got another one at the end of the half and would have made the second half much different.



Senior Lilly Scott clears the ball away from a De Soto player on May 24 in Louisburg.

“We just had some mistakes early when they scored and there was no cover help like we have been preaching the last couple weeks. We weren't as united as we have been in the back. You will have games like that throughout the year, but when you have a game like that against De Soto, you have to play well to beat them and unfortunately those things came back and got us.”

The loss also meant the team had to say goodbye to its three seniors. Midfielders Maddie McDaniel and Lilly Scott, along with defender Rylee Bergh as all three suited up for the Wildcats for the final time. The team also said farewell to manager Leslie Damian.

“Losing our three seniors is going to be difficult to replace,” Conley said. “They are good kids who work their butts off and leadership wise other kids are going to follow what they do. They don’t have to lead by voice that often, they lead by example and that is the best kind. It is great to have a vocal leader, but if you can lead by example and be that example every time, it just sets the tone for everyone else.

“Maddie had a nagging ankle injury for half the season and Lilly has had quad problems the last three weeks. There isn’t any fussing and not a lot of whining, it is just working hard and doing their job and carrying the team. They busted their butts and never played soft. Rylee kept us in a lot of games in the back and was just all over the place. Maddie got a lot of assists and Lilly helped distribute the ball out of the back which is huge. A lot of the times she was the girl before the assist and that opened up a lot of things. They all did very well academically and are going to further their education. Leslie was awesome too being the manager and team mom. When Mama Leslie talked, the team listened.”

The Wildcats shattered everyone’s expectations for the first-year program as it racked up a 14-4-1 record and captured a regional title. It was a special season for everyone involved and increased interest in girls soccer in Louisburg.

There were no baby steps in the program’s infancy. Instead, the Wildcats took one big giant step forward and are ready to get off the ground and take another one after a little stumble.

Still, the Wildcats know putting together a season like this one could be difficult to duplicate.

“I don’t know if a season like this is going to be repeated because it is going to be tough to do,” Conley said. “With 4A what it is, and the team’s you run into at regionals, it is tough to accomplish what these girls have done. We aren’t going to sneak up on anyone now. They are going to look at the schedule and say ‘Oh, look there is Louisburg, a first-year team.’ There were some teams that didn’t take us very seriously and we outworked them. That is not going to happen next year.”

Opinion: Wildcats pulling off improbable season



The Louisburg High School soccer gathers on the field to celebrate Thursday’s regional championship win over Basehor-Linwood on Thursday. In just their first year in program history, Louisburg has posted a 14-3-1 record and is one win away from the state tournament.

Two months ago, 24 players got off the bus for the first time nervously anticipating history.

The butterflies in their stomach wouldn't settle down and they didn't know what to expect. That night in March at Harmon High School, the group of Louisburg High School girls soccer players were about to become something bigger than themselves – they were becoming a team.

It was a new frontier for the players, along with coaches Kyle Conley and Michael Pickman. Neither had been a part of a new program before as they embarked on trying to form a group of girls – some who haven't played soccer in several years – into a cohesive unit.

After the Louisburg community helped raise nearly \$40,000 to help fund the team, no one on the Wildcat roster wanted to let anyone down. They wanted to make everyone proud, but with that, comes a sense of anxiousness.

The Wildcats came together to win their season opener 2-0 over Harmon and the entire team breathed a collective sigh of relief. That night gave Louisburg the confidence it was looking for.

As it turned out, the players had nothing to worry about. Fast forward to the present and the Wildcats have put together a record no one in the program could have ever imagined in its first season.

Louisburg racked up 13 more wins since that night at Harmon and just captured a regional title with a 3-1 victory over Basehor-Linwood on Thursday. The Wildcats are also currently ranked No. 4 in Class 4-1A.

“I don't think you can ever envision a new program winning a regional title,” Conley said. “We don't have a bunch of super club kids and we aren't a school that gets a bunch of kids to come in every year, but these kids work so hard. We may not be the most skilled teams at times, but we play with so much passion and heart.”

That they do.

This is my first go-round at covering a team in its infancy stages, but I can't imagine many programs can boast about the start this group of Louisburg players is having. Before the season, Conley was hoping his team could reach the .500 mark – which still would have been a great stepping stone.



Senior Lilly Scott gets ready to pass off to teammate Savannah Reinhart during Thursday's regional title game.

Instead, Conley and the Wildcats decided to take the elevator to the top floor. There apparently was no reason to stop in the middle.

Louisburg used the leadership of seniors Maddie McDaniel, Lilly Scott and Rylee Bergh to help form the team early in the season and the underclassmen have responded.

Sophomore Bailey Belcher is on a frantic scoring pace as she is sitting at 33 goals for the season, which would probably be a record in many long-standing programs, but Belcher keeps making Louisburg history with every goal.

Then there is Shay Whiting. The Louisburg sophomore had never played goalie before this season, but it hasn't shown. Whiting has eight shutouts on the season and has emerged as one of the best goalies in the Frontier League.



Louisburg goalie Shay Whiting dives on ball to prevent a goal Thursday.

Whiting has done this being vastly undersized, but what she lacks in size she makes up with tenacity.

“She is a bulldog,” Conley said of Whiting. “She has great instincts, her reaction time is pretty solid and her footwork isn't bad. She is undersized, so she has to fight that. She just plays hard and doesn't want to let anything in. If it is going to hit her, she doesn't care. She is going to break a ball one of these times because she is going to stand there, wear it and eat it up.

“Shay is a smart kid, she learns quickly and she figures it out. Her and Sarah (Wilson) both know what is expected and both work their butts off. Shay has played well all year but Sarah has been right there with her to push her. She has the right attitude and I am really proud of her.”

Although they have been major cogs in the Wildcats' success, the most astounding thing is Louisburg is winning with a roster filled with freshmen and sophomores. They have all

played their roles and done them well.

Those underclassmen have come through with game-winning goals, big stops on defense and have been there to pick each other up.

Yes, this group of Wildcats is quite the story. In just two short months, interest in girls soccer has taken off and more and more people are coming out to see what they are all about.

“Every one of them is playing so hard right now and I don’t think they want to let each other down,” Conley said. “That is awesome. We have avoided any drama and we are playing for each other. We are playing for everyone that comes to watch us, we are playing for this community and for all the girls that want to play high school soccer because now they have this opportunity.

“The girls are embracing that responsibility and they are going to run with it. We are a dangerous team because of it, because we are playing for everyone but ourselves.”

Louisburg hopes that run continues with a win Tuesday against De Soto in the state quarterfinals. The Wildcats defeated then-state ranked De Soto earlier this month in a dramatic come-from-behind win – a victory that put the rest of the league, and state on notice.

These girls are no fluke.

‘It just shows that we can work to get what we want,’ Belcher said. “Granted, nobody expected us to be here but we want to go to state and this is what we are going to do.”

Even with a loss Tuesday, this team has nothing to hang their head about. Louisburg has overcome the odds in its first season to become something no one could have fathomed.

They have already won.