

Louisburg downs Heritage Christian for second straight win



Louisburg junior Savannah Reinhart dribbles past a Piper defender during the Lady Cats' game on April 4 that was postponed. The Wildcats traveled to Heritage Christian on Thursday and came away with a 5-1 win.

OVERLAND PARK – The Louisburg High School girls soccer team has certainly found a rhythm offensively and it continued Thursday against Heritage Christian Academy.

Louisburg scored four first half goals and came away with a 5-1 road victory in Overland Park. It was the second consecutive victory for the Wildcats and they have now scored 11 goals in the last two games after scoring just one in their first two.

"I felt the girls did a fantastic job moving the ball and making runs off of the ball," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "We were really aggressive and attacked non-stop. I think our chemistry is getting really, really good. We are starting to react and anticipate what the other is going to do. I am very pleased with our level of focus and determination. We came out very strong and driven yesterday."

The combination of junior Bailey Belcher and freshman

Mackenzie Scholtz provided a big challenge for the Heritage Christian back line. Both players scored two first half goals to give the Wildcats a big lead early.

Scholtz added two assists to go with her two goals, while Belcher added a third goal in the second half to record her second straight hat trick. Belcher also added an assist in the win.

Midfielders Hallie Hutsell and Savannah Reinhart also worked well with Scholtz and Belcher to give them looks at the goal.

"Bailey and Mackenzie are playing extremely well right now," Conley said. "I feel that their play is opening up a lot of space for others because they are drawing so much attention. They both are doing a fantastic job moving off of the ball and it make it very difficult for teams to defend them and try to keep up with their work rate.

"More importantly they are getting the outside midfielders involved and are getting great play from them (Hallie and Savannah). The chemistry between the midfield and targets is the best it has been all year and I feel that it is only going to get better. Sholtzy is doing a very nice job of doing what I am asking her to do and she is playing extremely well right now."

Louisburg (2-1-1) also got good play out of its defense as the Wildcats have given up just two goals total in their last two wins and limited Heritage's shots on goal Thursday.

Outside backs Bryn O'Meara and Camdyn Clark, along with Hannah Straub, Bria Jensen, center back Kaitlyn Lewer and goalie Shay Whiting led the Louisburg defense.

"The defense is getting better and better each and every game," Conley said. "Heritage was a very physical team and I feel we did a nice job standing our ground. The second half we had some difficulty because they were hitting the ball almost

30-40 yards in the air with the wind. I feel we struggled a little bit to anticipate the bounce or the carry the ball would have from the wind pushing it, because it was the first time we played with a massive wind. I do like their communication and how they are playing with one another. I think this group has the potential to be extremely good.”

Belcher got the Wildcats off to a good start as she scored back-to-back goals to give Louisburg a 2-0 lead. Heritage scored to cut the lead in half, but Scholtz responded with two goals to end the first half and the Wildcats led 4-1 at halftime.

Louisburg added another goal in the second half as Belcher converted a penalty kick to seal the win.

The Wildcats put this winning streak together at less than full strength. The injury list is a long one for Louisburg as it has five players that will miss several weeks of action and others that are playing through the pain.

Among those are starters Trinity Moore (broken toe) and Lily Cook (concussion), while sophomore Hayli Detherage hopes to return soon after dealing with a back injury. With some of those injuries, other players have stepped up for the Wildcats and Conley likes what he has seen from his team.

“I was extremely happy with how well we played,” Conley said. “I think the second half we struggled to find feet and got into a kick match with them in which the wind won, but when we found feet and attacked we were a lot of fun to watch.”

Louisburg returns to action today when it travels to Ottawa. It is a varsity only matchup that will begin at 5 p.m. The Wildcats return home Thursday when it hosts Spring Hill.

The Wildcats hosted Piper on April 4, but the game was postponed with 10 minutes remaining in the first half as Louisburg had a 3-0 lead at the time. Belcher, Reinhart and

Scholtz all scored goals in the contest and will be resumed April 27 with the lead intact.

Frontier League shakeup could happen soon



In a few months – or even weeks – the Frontier League as it currently stands could have a different look.

Since March, meetings have gone on within member schools of the Frontier League and Kaw Valley League to discuss possible realignment of both leagues.

The Frontier League currently has seven members – Louisburg, Paola, Spring Hill, De Soto, Ottawa, Baldwin and Eudora – and a meeting between the schools took place on March 28 to discuss where each school stood as far as their happiness in the league.

Brian Biermann, superintendent of USD 416, and Louisburg High School athletic director Darin Gagnebin attended the meeting on Louisburg's behalf and both relayed the fact that every school stated they were happy with the way the league is currently set up, but a couple schools came to the realization the Frontier League might not be able to offer what they are looking for.

De Soto and Spring Hill currently have growing enrollment numbers and are interested in playing Class 5A competition. De Soto moved up to 5A this school year and Spring Hill will look to make the jump in the coming years with its larger enrollment. The rest of the schools all compete in Class 4A.

Both schools stated they would like more competition at the sub-varsity level that schools like Louisburg, Baldwin and Eudora cannot provide. Competing in a mainly 5A league would relieve some of those problems.

“De Soto said they will probably open next year with 950 kids and they would grow by 100 the year after that,” Biermann said. “They are happy in the Frontier, but they feel like they need 5A competition and they feel like it could hurt them in football with seedings and tie-breakers. They could potentially get penalized by competing in a mainly 4A league.

“Spring Hill wants to be proactive. Their growth is coming. Their classes in the middle school are pretty good size. They won’t grow a lot next year, but they will in the next few years.”

What started the meetings is due to the fact that the Kaw Valley League is looking to rework their situation or create a brand new look altogether. The Kaw Valley currently has seven schools in Lansing, Turner, Bonner Springs, Tonganoxie, Piper, Bishop Ward and Basehor-Linwood, but one member – Bishop Ward – is leaving for a new league beginning next school year.

According to a report in March from the *Tonganoxie Mirror*, Lansing wants to create a larger league that would contain all or some combinations of Lansing, Blue Valley Southwest, De Soto, Leavenworth, Bonner Springs, Basehor-Linwood, Tonganoxie, Ottawa, Piper, Spring Hill, Turner and Topeka schools Seaman, Shawnee Heights and Topeka West.

Many of those schools are either in Class 5A already or are close based on enrollment numbers. The idea of competing

against bigger competition is intriguing to De Soto, Spring Hill – and possibly Ottawa – the three largest schools in the Frontier League.

An idea was thrown around of creating a league of two divisions between the Kaw Valley and Frontier. One division would be 5A schools and the other would be 4A.

“We visited with our board of education and we are not in favor of a mega-league,” Biermann said. “That has been talked about – having a league of 5A and 4A schools. We don’t want to invite new 5A schools. We are ok with Spring Hill and De Soto staying in the league, even though they are growing, but we don’t want to invite other 5A schools or have a mega league so they can have better competition.

“Our stance is if De Soto and Spring Hill feel like they need 5A competition and leave, then they can work towards that and we can work on filling those spots with 4A schools.”

Both Biermann and Gagnebin feel like the Frontier League needs to be proactive as changes could be made sooner rather than later.

“We aren’t panicking as a league as much as the Kaw Valley schools are because they know they are headed for a break up,” Gagnebin said. “We could easily stay with the seven schools we have. Pretty soon, De Soto will have close to 1,000 kids. It is more on them if they want to be in our league, and if they are happy, by all means stay. We are not saying they have to leave, but they have to do best what is for their school, and if this league isn’t the best option for you, then you have to look elsewhere.”

Due to the fact De Soto and Spring Hill could be moving on, the Frontier is being proactive and inviting some members of the Kaw Valley League to come make presentations at a meeting Wednesday to see if they would be a fit in the Frontier.

According to Biermann, Tonganoxie, Piper, Bonner Springs and Basehor-Linwood High Schools will all make presentations at the meeting and then schools from both the Kaw Valley and the Frontier will meet to discuss options at a later date.

"I led the (March 28) meeting and I wanted to make sure everyone was as honest and open as possible," Biermann said. "There were no hurt feelings. Collectively we don't want a mega-league, no additional 5A schools and that is firm from us, Paola, Baldwin and Eudora. Spring Hill and De Soto left the meeting, I think, that they need to start looking for potential 5A competition.

"The easy fix would be for De Soto and Spring Hill to join the bigger league and we take someone like Tonganoxie and Piper to replace them. Every school said they loved the Frontier League and competition, but it is time there has to be some conversations. The biggest thing is we don't have three baseball, softball or soccer teams to schedule, but De Soto and Spring Hill want that. We can't field C teams in some cases."

The leagues are on a sort of a time crunch. With football reclassifications and scheduling beginning this October for the next two years, it would be the best case scenario to get the reshuffling done before then so they can schedule for the 2018-19 season and beyond according to Gagnebin.

The Louisburg activities director also believes keeping the right number of teams is also imperative for a healthy league.

"We want to maintain the integrity of our league, whether that is with seven or even eight schools," Gagnebin said. "We want to maintain that number. Nine is a scheduling nightmare, and if you only have six teams, you are opening up a can of worms where if you leave an open spot, then the state could come in and assign certain schools to us that aren't a good fit.

"I don't necessarily want them to leave the league, but we

need to be told if they are. I am more afraid of them leaving our league than them staying in our league. I am not afraid of the competition we face with them. We can compete with them in all the sports, but I am more afraid of us dropping from a seven to a five-team league.”

However, one hiccup remains. The Frontier League bylaws state that a member school must give two years notice before leaving the league.

“If the dominoes start falling fast, the league could pass a bylaw amendment to allow for movement for De Soto or whoever, which is something I think they will have to do,” Gagnebin said. “Not much is happening now, but when it does it is going to happen quick. You better be ready to move with it and have a plan in place or you could be stuck on the outside.”

Belcher's four goals help Wildcats to first win



Louisburg junior Bailey Belcher (4) recorded her first hat trick of the season as she finished with four goals in the Wildcats' 6-1 win over Sumner Academy on Thursday in Kansas City, Kan.

KANSAS CITY, Kan. – Whatever invisible barrier or obstacle that prevented the Louisburg girls soccer team from finding the back of the net went away Thursday.

After only scoring one goal in their first two games, the Wildcats went on a scoring barrage against Sumner Academy – more specifically in the second half. Louisburg scored five second-half goals en route to a 6-1 victory over the Sabres in Kansas City to get its first victory of the season.

“It was really nice to get going,” Conley said. “We were struggling in the first half to move the ball and attack when we had numbers, but at the same time we missed three breakaways. The second half was a much different story. We moved the ball well and attacked when we had spaces and numbers. I was very pleased with how hard we played. We played together and improved our communication quite a bit.”

A bulk of the Wildcats’ scoring was thanks to the feet of Bailey Belcher. The Louisburg junior recorded her first hat trick of the season and finished the game with four goals.

Belcher scored the team’s lone goal in the first half, before coming through with three more in the second half. Belcher finished with 33 goals on the season last year and Conley knows it was good for her to find success.

“It was nice to see Bailey find the back of the net, especially how frustrating it was during the Tonganoxie game,” Conley said. “It’s really nice seeing us move the ball to get in those scoring positions. It did provide us with some confidence and that showed in our play the rest of the game.”

Following halftime, it was freshman Mackenzie Scholtz who got in on the scoring as she gave the Wildcats a 2-0 lead. Belcher followed with three straight goals and freshman Morgan Messer secured the win with her first varsity goal late in the game.

Although Louisburg allowed a late Sumner goal, Conley was

pleased with his defense and the way they shut down the Sabres for most of the match.

“We did a nice job defensively,” Conley said. “I feel we played pretty well and contained the little attack that they had. We did maintain the ball a lot and attacked a lot in the second half especially. We had a lot of opportunities and played hard. Defensively we played pretty well and are still working on our chemistry. I think that we are getting better with that, but it needs to keep improving.”

The Wildcats (1-1-1) will get another test tomorrow when it hosts Piper. The junior varsity is set for 4:30 p.m., and the varsity will follow. Conley hopes this win can help his team put together a nice winning streak.

“It was nice to have a game that we were in control of because it gave us an opportunity to get some kids some more minutes who don’t usually don’t get that much time,” Conley said. “I was pleased with how hard we played and the amount of energy we played with. Getting that first win always helps as well.”

JUNIOR VARSITY GETS SECOND WIN

The Louisburg junior varsity girls bounced back from their loss against De Soto with a 2-0 victory over Sumner Academy on Thursday.

Freshman Erin Lemke scored for the Wildcats and Louisburg was also aided with an own goal from Sumner Academy. Goalies Carson Buffington and Savannah Clark combined for the shutout and moves the Lady Cats record to 2-1.

Wildcats come up short in battle of ranked teams



Senior midfielder Madisen Simpson clears the ball away from the De Soto end of the field Tuesday at Louisburg High School. Louisburg, the No. 5 ranked team in Class 4-1A, fell 3-1 to De Soto, which is ranked No. 5 in Class 5A.

It may have been only the second game of the season for the Louisburg High School girls soccer team, but the Wildcats' matchup with De Soto was big in several ways.

Both squads came to Tuesday's game ranked No. 5 in the state in their respective divisions and are considered two of the top teams to contend for a Frontier League title. Throw in the fact it was Louisburg's home opener and the Wildcats had a lot on the line.

Instead, it was De Soto that came out on top with a 3-1 win over the Wildcats in what was a close match throughout. De Soto scored two second half goals that broke open a tie game – a game in which Louisburg took an early lead.

"I thought the game played out as expected," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "We are coming off of spring break with limited practice and numbers. They had a week of practice and two games prior. Their fitness was better, but I felt we

played extremely competitive, especially for the first 25 minutes or so. I think we played extremely hard and with a lot of heart. It is frustrating playing the best team on our schedule coming out of spring break, but we will learn from it and get better."

Louisburg (0-1-1) struggled offensively in its first game of the season, which in ended in a scoreless tie with Tonganoxie. It took the Wildcats less than a minute to find the back of the net against De Soto.

Freshman Mackenzie Scholtz played the ball to fellow freshman Trinity Moore, who dribbled down the right side and sent a shot over the head of the De Soto goalie that gave the Wildcats their first goal of the season 43 seconds into the game. In turn, it was also Moore's first varsity goal.

"Scoring that early on them was fantastic, especially how frustrating the Tonganoxie game was," Conley said. "I think they were shell shocked and it took them a while to regroup. It was very nice to have Trinity get her first goal against such a good side."

With six minutes left in the first half, De Soto evened the score as Mackenzie Mohl sent a pass in the box and Tanith Beal knocked it past Louisburg goalie Shay Whiting.

A few minutes later, Louisburg had a good look that nearly gave it the lead back as a shot from freshman Avery O'Meara from 20 yards out sailed just above the crossbar.



Wildcat freshman Hannah Straub heads the ball away from the De Soto attack Tuesday in Louisburg.

De Soto took the ball right back down the field and with five seconds left before halftime, took a hard shot on goal but Whiting got the save and kept the match tied.

In the second half, De Soto was able to control possession and had several shots on goal. With 17 minutes remaining in the game, Jasmine Diaz got past the Wildcat defense and hit a soft

shot that got under the hands of Whiting and into the back of the net.

Then with two seconds left in the game, De Soto's Macey Harrington added another score to complete the two-goal win.

"De Soto is the best team on our schedule," Conley said. "Also knowing that fitness was going to also be an issue, we tried to conserve some energy. The game was very similar to the games last year though. We didn't mind allowing them to make touches side to side, but we did not want them to go to the middle of the field. I think we lived up to our motto 'Bend but don't break.' They are an incredibly talented team and I look for them to have a very, very successful season.

"The last two goals were not good goals at all. If the second one doesn't happen then the third doesn't happen. It was extremely surprising to see that type of shot go in on the second goal, but it is what it is. We had several opportunities to get some ourselves."

Louisburg will try for its first win of the season Thursday, but it will have to do it on the road when it travels to Sumner Academy. The varsity game is set for approximately 6 p.m.

Although Tuesday ended in a loss for the Wildcats, Conley liked what he saw from his team and their potential moving forward.

"I was extremely pleased with how our girls didn't quit or put their heads down," Conley said. "We kept fighting to the very end. I loved the amount of intensity that we played with and kept competing.

"This a great learning opportunity and we will get better. The goal I have for these ladies is we get better each and every day. Each game should be better than the prior game. We will rebound and be ready to play another 5A school Thursday."

Wildcats tie Tonganoxie in season opener



Louisburg senior Lily Cook pushes the ball up the field during Thursday's season opener against Tonganoxie at Tonganoxie High School. The Wildcats ended the match with a 0-0 tie.

TONGANOXIE – Louisburg earned the shutout, dominated possession and put together a couple dozen shots on goal.

It was everything the Wildcats could have hoped for in their season opener Thursday against Tonganoxie – well, almost everything.

Despite all that, Louisburg couldn't find the back of the net and its first game of the season ended in a 0-0 draw after two overtimes at Tonganoxie High School. The Wildcats had several opportunities to get on the board, but encountered some bad luck along the way.

"We tried to do the right thing," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "There were about 10 minutes where we were pretty amped up and we just dribbled way too much. Then we realized if we passed the ball it is way easier and not nearly as tired.

"They are frustrated because they know that this is a game

they should have won. I told them what they did last year means nothing this year. Everything you get is what you are going to earn, and if you don't want to earn it, no one is going to give you anything. That is the message we are going to take from this and we will get better from it."

The Wildcats' offense was aggressive from the start as they outshot Tonganoxie 24-4 on shots on goal as they had several nearly find the back of the net. Junior Bailey Belcher, along with freshmen Mackenzie Scholtz and Trinity Moore, had a bulk of those shots.

Seniors Madisen Simpson and Lily Cook, along with junior Savannah Reinhart, also had shots on goal, but nothing Louisburg tried seemed to work.

"Our expectation is that this is a game we should have won," Conley said. "When you outshoot someone 24-4, and those aren't shots, those are shots on goal – you have to be able to bury one. I think we hit the post six times and that is on us not finishing and doing our job. The burden probably falls on me a little bit. We probably weren't as fit as we needed to be coming in."



Hallie Hutsell crosses the ball to the opposite side of the field Thursday against Tonganoxie.

Louisburg controlled possession for much of the game, but Tonganoxie had a few different opportunities at a score in the second half and in the two overtimes. However, with the four shots on goal, each time Wildcat goalie Shay Whiting was there to turn it away.

Whiting corralled the Tonganoxie shots at some nerve-racking points in the game, including in the second overtime as she had a jump save off a Chieftain corner kick in the second overtime to earn the shutout.

“Shay did a good job cleaning stuff up and really had good angles,” Conley said. “She had everything covered. I was worried with the wind that one would just float in there, but she did a good job of communicating and talking with everyone.”

The Wildcats seemed to get more comfortable as the game went on and had good looks at the goal, including in both extra periods. In the first overtime, Cook and Belcher each had shots that missed just wide of the goal, but the best opportunity late in the period when Belcher took a shot that hit off the post and her follow was stopped by a diving save from the Tonganoxie goalie.

Early in the second overtime, Moore dribbled down the sideline and crossed the ball into the box to a sliding Scholtz, whose shot was knocked away and the Wildcats left Tonganoxie with a tie.

"The kids didn't quit and they won't because they are that type of kid," Conley said. "I think we started making adjustments and seeing where we need to be. We had some of them playing in spots they aren't used to playing in and as the game went along we started make adjustments and made a lot better runs at the end of the game. We just missed that final pass. You can't take anything away from the Tonganoxie goalkeeper any because she made some huge saves for them."

The schedule doesn't get easier for Louisburg as it will host defending Frontier League champion De Soto on March 28 in its home opener. The junior varsity will begin at 4:30 p.m., and the varsity will follow at approximately 6 p.m.

"There are a lot of distractions the first couple of weeks because there are so many other things going on," Conley said. "It is tough to get a flow because some kids are missing time here and there for other things, which is fine. Once we get done with spring break, we can get into a flow and just focus and everyone is there. We can push a little bit and we can get better. It allows us to get some consistency and that will help us quite a bit."

JUNIOR VARSITY WINS OPENER

The Louisburg junior varsity opener got off on the right track to start its season as it downed Tonganoxie 2-0.

The Wildcats got goals from freshmen Erin Lemke and Morgan Messer, while goalies Carson Buffington and Savannah Clark combined to earn the shutout.

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 Lower 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 Seuferling, Mariah Wrigley, Madelynn Yalowitz, Bryn O'Meara, Morgan Strumillo and Lexie Reece all came away with honors from nationals.

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

4. Griffin signs with New Orleans Saints



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

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

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

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

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

3. Wildcat football rallies around coach, ends playoff drought



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

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

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

2. Girls soccer team wins regional crown during inaugural season



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

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

The Wildcats had every reason to be excited.

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

1. Boys soccer advances to state final four



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

The state quarterfinal round had been nothing but heartbreak

for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

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

There was no imagining this time around.

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

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

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.