

Moore's comeback ends with first state wrestling medal



Louisburg senior Austin Moore (right) battles Wellington's Kenny Fehrman during the third-place match at 220 pounds Saturday during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships in Salina.

SALINA – Back in early November of 2018, Austin Moore was in a sling with a broken collarbone and he wondered why all this was happening.

Moore suffered the injury during the regional football playoffs and he didn't get to finish his final high school season. Not only that, his hopes of getting his first state wrestling medal was in serious jeopardy.

A little more than four months later, Moore was on the medal stand with some of the state's best wrestlers in his weight class.

The Louisburg senior earned a fourth-place medal at 220 pounds during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships last Saturday at the Tony's Pizza Events Center in Salina. It was his first high school state medal and it marked the end of a

long journey for
Moore.

“It was pretty special for me to get a state medal, especially because it has been a goal of mine ever since I started wrestling,” Moore said. “Overall, I felt like I wrestled pretty well, but I just wish I could’ve ended it on a win.”

Moore got out to a strong start in the state tournament as he earned a spot in the semifinals. He opened tournament action with a 30 second pin of Chanute’s Toker Davis and then pulled out a 3-2 decision in overtime against Scott City’s Kyle Sherwood.

Unfortunately for Moore, he ran into eventual state champion Braden Morgan of El Dorado in the semifinals and was pinned.



Senior Austin Moore pulls his opponent to the mat Saturday during the Class 4A state tournament in Salina.

Still, Moore was able to win another match on the back side of the bracket with a 7-2

decision over Winfield's

Zach Phillips and went up against Wellington's Kenny Fehrman for third place.

Moore and Fehrman went into

overtime, but the Louisburg senior lost a 3-1 decision to give him the

fourth-place medal. The match was tied at 1-all in the third period, but Moore

couldn't get the escape he needed to take the lead and Fehrman forced overtime,

where he was able to get a takedown.

Despite the loss, and shortened

season, Moore was happy with his year and he was able to accomplish his goal of

a state medal.

"It was definitely a quick season,

but I had a lot of fun with my teammates and coaches," Moore said. "I wasn't

even sure if I was going to be able to wrestle at all during most of the season

because of the injury, so at first I didn't even know if it would be possible

for me to get a medal. I am very thankful that I got healed up and decided to wrestle

my senior year.

"I'm already missing it quite a

bit. It feels like I should have more matches left since I really only wrestled

half of the matches that most people usually do in one year. I was a little

disappointed with my last match, but I was also thankful that I even had the

opportunity to wrestle in the state tournament and earn a medal."

Moore's return to the team in late January also helped the rest of the Wildcat squad as they geared up for their stretch run.

"When you think about the fact that Austin missed nearly two-thirds of the season because of the broken collarbone, he finished remarkably well," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "He went out and wrestled with kids who had 30-plus matches this season, kids who have been to state before, and kids who had been ranked throughout the season.

"Last season was a tough ending for him, losing a decision in the blood round on a last-second takedown, and then there was the uncertainty for this season. We missed having Austin in the practice room the first part of the season, but once he got cleared, he never looked back and the team morale was definitely boosted with his presence."

Although Moore was the Wildcats' lone medalist on the season, Louisburg had two other wrestlers who were one win away from accomplishing that goal in senior Blue Caplinger and sophomore Cade Holtzen.



Louisburg senior Blue Caplinger tries to keep Prairie View's Hunter Boone on the mat during his blood round match Saturday in Salina.

Caplinger was on the verge on the earning a state medal on two different occasions, but in both instances, he was on the wrong end of a call in the final seconds of both matches.

The Louisburg 170-pounder began his state tournament with a 14-1 major decision of Winfield's Cole Finey and then met Smoky Valley's Dax Hopp in the quarterfinals.

Caplinger had a one point lead with less than five seconds left in the match when the two wrestlers were scrambling and Hopp was able to get the takedown as time expired. The lead official didn't see the takedown and didn't award the points, but the second official went over after time was up and told the lead official what he saw and gave Hopp the two points and

the win in the
6-5 match.

Despite the disappointment, Caplinger (32-5) battled back to pin
Frontenac's Storm Niegsch in 42 seconds and advanced to the
blood round where
Caplinger met Prairie View's Hunter Boone.

Caplinger, who had defeated Boone on a couple different
occasions this
season, found himself in a close match with the Prairie View
junior. The two
went into overtime, and Caplinger was able to get a takedown
to take a 4-2
lead.

As time was running out in the third overtime, Boone was able
to take
Caplinger down to the mat as time expired to tie the match
again. Officials
confirmed with the table that time hadn't expired and it went
to an ultimate
tie-breaker.

Caplinger had to ride out Boone for 30 seconds to get the win,
but
Boone was able to get the escape for the victory. The loss
ended Caplinger's
Wildcat career as he was trying for his first state medal.

"I think Blue's state tournament is one that will stick with
me the
rest of my career," Bovaird said. "Anyone who knows Blue
understands what a
great young man he is. Blue embodies so much about what
wrestling is all
about. I wanted him to get that state medal so badly, and he

came so close not once, but twice. He'll get over the pain of the loss, as will I. With these sorts of setbacks, Blue has demonstrated that he's gained the resilience to be a champion in life."



Sophomore Cade Holtzen tries to turn his opponent Saturday during the Class 4A state tournament at 113 pounds.

As for Holtzen, the Wildcat 113-pounder opened the tournament with a pin of Augusta's Collin Jackson and then met the state's No. 1-ranked wrestler in the quarterfinals in Abilene's William Stroda.

Holtzen and Stroda were in a low scoring match, but Stroda was able to get a third-period escape and leave with a 1-0 decision.

That loss sent Holtzen (33-6) to the consolation side where he won a 4-2 decision over Russell's Stephan Baldwin that sent him to the blood round.

It was there where he saw Rose Hill's Kyle Sackett and lost a 4-0 decision that dashed Holtzen's hopes of earning his second consecutive state medal.

"That sophomore year is always tough when it follows such a successful freshman season," Bovaird said. "Cade made some huge strides this season with his technique and his mindset approach to wrestling. Regardless of the preparation and the focus we put on our wrestling mindset, there's always going to be that pressure in the back of the guys' minds. It's human nature to remember past successes and for those things to be present.

"That's the mark of a champion, to be able to overcome those voices of doubt and questioning. And I think Cade did just that. He demonstrated it throughout the season. He just fell in a tough part of the bracket."

Freshman Brandon Doles (145 pounds) finished his first state tournament with a 1-2 record after winning a regional title the week before, while senior Gabe Bonham (138) and sophomore Ryan Owens (120) each finished the tournament 0-2.

"One of the toughest parts about coaching wrestling is when you have a senior who has just wrestled his last match," Bovaird said. "There's not a lot you can say to make it easier, and sometimes all you can do is pick him up and give

him a hug, let him know it's going to be all right. Gabe wrestled phenomenally for us this season, and he was a great addition to the program.

"Ryan and Brandon both had some great moments at state, and that's awesome experience for them down the road. Ryan overcame the fact that he's giving up so much weight and he still battled with some of the state's toughest. Brandon came out as a freshman in the middle weights – a weight usually populated by seniors – and won a regional championship for us. At state, he won a big match to make it to the second day."