

Wildcat wrestling falls to Piper on Senior Night



Louisburg senior Blue Caplinger works for a pin Thursday during the Wildcats' dual with Piper on Senior Night at Louisburg High School.

In what was its final time to wrestle on its home mats, the Louisburg wrestling team wanted to leave a positive impression.

The Wildcats battled hard Thursday when it hosted Piper on Senior Night, but came up just short as they fell, 39-31. Louisburg had to give up points in three open weight classes, which turned out to be the difference.

"On paper, I thought we matched up pretty well with Piper," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "It looked like several of the matches were going our way, and we should have been able to pull out the dual win, despite giving up opens at 126, 132 and 285. Their coach did some last-minute playing around with their line-up, and it worked out in their favor unfortunately."

With both teams open at 106, the Wildcats got on the board

first as sophomore Cade Holtzen earned a pin at 113 pounds and sophomore Ryan Owens won by decision at 120.



Louisburg senior Gabe Bonham tries to pick up his opponent during the 138 pound match.

Louisburg was open at the next two weights, but picked up victories when senior Gabe Bonham won by pin at 138 and freshman Brandon Doles won by major decision at 145. Piper won two matches before senior Blue Caplinger won by pin at 170 pounds.

However, Piper had the upper-hand in three of the next four matches to help seal the win over Louisburg. Senior Austin Moore was the Wildcats' lone victory when he won by pin at 220 pounds.

"There were lots of positives worth noting, but in the end, it was the holes in our lineup that hurt us," Bovaird said. "We're a small and young team. Next season, we'll be looking to solidify our lineup some more. It's just tough dropping our

last dual of the season on Senior Night. I was hoping for a little bit of a morale boost from that win. That's the way things go. We've got no choice but to refocus and hit our reset button for the next three weeks."

Before the dual, the Wildcat had a chance to honor their five seniors in Brian Houck, Hunter Day, along with Bonham, Caplinger and Moore. All five wrestlers have left their stamp on the Wildcat program and they still plan on doing more when postseason wrestling begins later this week.

"Gabe moved here from Gardner the summer before his junior year," Bovaird said. "He's been a welcome addition to the program, bringing a very strong background in wrestling and a very positive attitude. He's a very dynamic wrestler who's dangerous on his feet and on top.

"Blue has been a quiet team leader for a long time now. He's got a work ethic and discipline that you don't find too often with teenagers. He's got a charismatic personality that inspires his peers.

"Hunter wears a friendly smile on his face all the time, and that positivity will be missed. This season has been tough seeing him sidelined with a shoulder injury. I know it's been killing him not being able to finish his senior year. He's remained with the program and been a very positive supporter for the

guys every
week.



Gabe Bonham



Blue Caplinger



Hunter Day



Raven Hamilton



■ Brian Houck



Kammy Mitchell



Austin Moore



Claire Reitz

“Brian moved here from West Virginia his sophomore year. I saw him in the hallway and struck up a conversation with him. ‘You look like a wrestler,’ I said to him. He had no experience in the sport, but he gave it a shot and he’s been a hard worker for us ever since. He’s got an incredibly promising future and I’ve been very proud to work with him these last three years.

“Austin is the kind of kid who inspires his teammates, and he doesn’t even have to say much,”

Bovaird continued. "Once he got cleared to return to wrestling after his broken collarbone, we feel an immediate change in the practice room atmosphere. He's a dedicated leader, an example of the term 'hard work,' and an incredible motivator for his peers. I can't tell you how happy I am that he's able to salvage the remaining part of his senior season."

Along with the wrestlers, Louisburg also honored its three senior managers as Raven Hamilton, Claire Reitz and Kammy Mitchell were recognized for their years of service as well.

"These three managers have been dedicating so much time these past four years," Bovaird said. "I'm not sure what we'll do without them next year. I can only hope the younger managers have paid attention to the awesome work they've been doing, whether it's washing uniforms, keeping stats at tournaments, videoing matches, taking photographs, running errands, or any other odd task the coaches have given them. They're all outstanding young adults and we can't thank them enough for everything they do."

Louisburg will begin its postseason schedule starting Saturday when the Wildcats travel to Paola for the Frontier League Tournament. Matches are set to begin at 9 a.m.