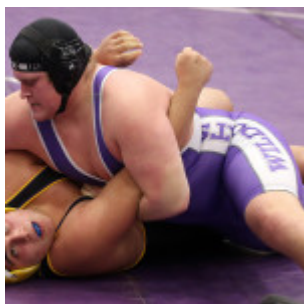


Vance wins regional, Wildcats qualify five for state



Louisburg junior Anders Vance works to pin Spring Hill's Sam Christy on Saturday at the Class 4A regional wrestling tournament in Louisburg. Vance won the regional crown at 285 pounds and was one of five Wildcats to qualify for state

The first time Anders Vance took to the wrestling mat was in the eighth grade.

Ironically, that was the last time the Louisburg High School wrestling team qualified anyone for the state tournament, which was in 2012. It was only fitting that Vance, a junior, was the one who broke the two-year drought.

On Friday, Vance became the first Wildcat to qualify for the Class 4A state tournament during the regional tournament in Louisburg since 2012. The Louisburg heavyweight won his semifinal match and eventually became regional champion after he pinned Spring Hill's Sam Christy in just 53 seconds in the championship match.

"To be honest, I really wasn't expecting this," Vance said. "I came in thinking that I would do all right, but I really didn't come in thinking I was going to win regionals. I am definitely happy with the way it turned out."

The good news didn't stop there, however, as the Wildcats qualified four more for the state tournament and by the time Saturday was over Louisburg sat in fourth-place in the team standings. Not too bad for a team that had a rough couple of years.

Senior Brenton Wrigley (195 pounds), sophomores Mason Koechner (220) and Nathan Keegan (113), along with freshman Ryan Adams (138) will all make the trip to Salina this Friday in hopes for a state medal. The top four in each weight class earned spots at state.

"To qualify five kids was an attainable goal," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "Earlier in the season, I wasn't sure how we would end up, but as we neared the post season, the coaching staff saw a huge shift in the mindsets of our guys. We saw a level of competitiveness that hadn't been there before.

"We're all very excited after this weekend. It's not just a relief after having been shut out the last two seasons. It's an excitement due to the fact that our guys who have qualified can compete with the top tier of wrestlers in the state. We're not just going to be looking to make a trip to Salina; we're going to be looking to win some medals."

The Wildcats displayed some competitive fire throughout the tournament and Vance was front and center. He opened the tournament with a 29 second pin of Iola's Colton Toney and then advanced to the semifinals where he defeated Paola's Jaymes Carter in a 3-1 decision.

Vance (26-7) then faced off with Christy, who he had lost to a week earlier at the Frontier League meet, and was able to get some revenge with his quick pin.

"You know, I am just really excited that we were able to get five guys to state," Vance said. "We haven't had that many qualify at one time in a while and it is pretty cool to be

able to be a part of that.”

Just like Vance, Wrigley is in his third year with the program and was able to qualify as a senior, which made the moment a little more special for him.



Louisburg senior Brenton Wrigley celebrates his victory in the consolation semifinals Saturday during the Class 4A regional tournament at Louisburg High School.

Wrigley, who is ranked No. 5 in Class 4A at 195 pounds, reached the semifinals after a major decision over Ottawa's Garrett Gross. In the semis, however, Wrigley (34-7) got caught by Chanute's Alex Son for a first period pin.

He came through the back side of the bracket with a 3-1 decision over Paola's Jake Miller to earn a spot at state and then finished it off with a 5-1 decision over Frontenac's Kylan Dixon to take third overall.

"To qualify for state my senior year is great," Wrigley said. "I came into the season expecting to qualify for state and now it is here. I am not satisfied though. I still want a state medal and that is what I am going to try and get."

Keegan had to travel a different road than some of the others as he was on the junior varsity a year ago and wasn't even the team's 113-pounder on varsity to start the year. But due to an injury early in the year, he took the spot and never looked back.



Louisburg sophomore Nathan Keegan works for a pin Saturday in the consolation semifinals.

He started the tournament with a pin in the quarterfinals

before losing a tough 6-4 decision to Independence's Carl Jesse. Keegan (29-17) rebounded to pin Osawatomie's Kitana Diediker in the first period to earn a spot at state and then went on to take third after he pinned Columbus' Nate Thomas in 4 minutes and 13 seconds.

"Nathan has been surging with confidence all season," Bovaird said. "He spent most of last season at JV behind David Bindi, and this year he started at a weight where he didn't have to do much weight-cutting. When David's season was ended by a second concussion, Nathan jumped on the chance to move down to 113. He's been pretty dominant there ever since."

Although he may be just a freshman, Adams has plenty of experience behind him as he has wrestled in the kids' club for several years. He used that tournament experience to earn a third-place finish.

Adams (35-10) nearly found himself in the championship match, but lost a 12-11 decision to Frontenac's Brandon Miekus in a match that went back and forth. Instead of sulking, he rebounded to beat Columbus' Zach Porter in a 7-4 decision in the consolation semis and then pinned Fort Scott's Zarek Fewell in the second period.



Louisburg freshman Ryan Adams qualified for state at 138 pounds and was one of five Wildcats to advance to state this weekend in Salina.

“I really wasn’t nervous at all,” Adams said. “That semifinal match was a little frustrating because I had beaten (Miekus) in kids club before and I didn’t wrestle as well as I should have.”

“I am still excited about qualifying for state and I think we are really coming together as a team right now and I am happy to be a part of it.”

According to Bovaird, it appears Adams can even tell the future.

“With Ryan, I’m very happy with how he’s come along,” Bovaird said. “After he won the match to qualify for state, he gave me a big hug and reminded me of a promise he’d made a year ago – he’d be a state qualifier for the Wildcats.”

Looking at just the wins, it wasn’t surprising Koechner will make the trip to state. At 220 pounds, he currently has a record of 38-12, which leads the team, but had a tough road.



Mason Koechner, a Louisburg sophomore, pinned his way to state with four victories over the two-day tournament, all by pin.

Koechner took the challenge head on as he recorded all four of his wins in the tournament by pin, including a pin of Chanute’s Gage Clark in the consolation semifinals to secure his state bid. The Louisburg sophomore wrestled six matches in two days, the most on the team and eventually finished fourth

after falling to Paola's Dunkan Watrous in the third-place match.

"The one thing about it was there was no easy match or round," Koechner said. "Every match was tough and there was some good competition. It feels good to make the trip to state and I know it is only going to get harder."

Louisburg nearly got two more to state, but sophomore Lyndon Smith (182) and freshman Tucker Batten (126) each fell in the consolation semifinals to end their season.

Smith battled in the back side of the bracket as he found himself down big in two matches Saturday, only to fight back and pin both opponents to reach the consolation semis.

"Lyndon showed that he is a dangerous wrestler," Bovaird said. "In two of his matches Saturday, he was losing to wrestlers who were more experienced, but he kept battling and caught and pinned both of them. We thought he'd have a good shot at upsetting his last opponent and making it into state. You never know – weird things happen in February. Lyndon came close to making it happen. He came off the mat after his last loss with a smile on his face. He knew he'd given it his best shot, that he'd gone further than anyone would have expected him to go.

"I've been able to work with Tucker since his seventh-grade year, and I've always known he is a talented wrestler. He won three matches at the regional tournament, and he's been a freshman stuck in a tough weight class all season. He's taken his lumps, but he's also come pretty far. I'm excited to see what he can accomplish the next three years now that he's got a year experience under his belt."

On what was a day for celebration, the Wildcats had to say goodbye to senior Zach Knox, who finished with a 21-14 record at 132 pounds after losing his first consolation match Saturday.

“His loss was the toughest to handle. Zach is a kid who started as a freshman and really caught on to the sport. As a freshman, he got a good amount of experience on varsity, but was stuck behind Cullen Hood, Austin Hood, and Austen Scott,” Bovaird said. “Then, as a sophomore and junior, he really made huge strides forward. Over the years, he’s got his name in our record books for the Top 5 in several season and career records.

“He was a captain this year, won the Topeka tournament, and was seeded in a good spot to qualify. When he got eliminated from the tournament, it really broke my heart for him. We both shed a lot of tears out in the hallways after that. I’m very proud of what he’s done in high school sports, and I’m really thankful for him being a part of the program. He’s the only member of the class of 2015 who stayed with wrestling all four years.”