Wildcats gear up for state run



Mason Koechner is one of five Louisburg wrestlers to make an appearance at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships beginning Friday at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

It could be easy for the five state qualifiers on the Louisburg High School wrestling team to look back and be satisfied with the season they've had.

All five are first-time state qualifiers, and for some people, that would be enough. Louisburg also hasn't qualified anyone for state since 2012 so the season could already be considered a success.

That is far from the attitude the Wildcats will take to the mat Friday when the Class 4A state tournament begins at the Salina Bicentennial Center. They want to make sure they come home with some hardware.

"This team is ready to go," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "We talked about the boys' strengths and why they should go to Salina expecting to win matches and bring home medals. It's not a matter of 'I hope' or 'I wish'; instead, it's a matter of being confident and believing in their own abilities.

“I’m excited for state, more excited than I’ve ever been. Maybe it’s because this state team has been three years in the making. We’re competitive, and we’re talented. Once these guys fully understand that, they can make a huge impact at state.”

The tournament, which is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. on Friday, won’t be easy for any of the five Wildcats. Even for regional champion Anders Vance, the road is a difficult one.

Vance (26-7) will square off with Ulysses’ Austin Ochoa (20-14) in the first round, and if he advances, will set up a possible revenge match with Wamego’s Kasey Feyh (31-2), who he lost to a month ago at Baldwin.

“Anders will have a tough first match against a western Kansas kid,” Bovaird said. “Western Kansas has always had a reputation for tough kids, but the advantage is that we know nothing about them and they know nothing about us.

“In the second round, Anders may have a rematch with a Wamego kid who beat him at Baldwin. The best place to have a revenge victory is at state. That would put him in the semifinals, guaranteeing him a top-6 finish.”

Senior Brenton Wrigley (34-7) will begin his journey to a possible state medal at 195 pounds when he faces Hugoton’s Noel Camancho (20-14) in the first round. Sophomore 113-pounder Nathan Keegan (29-17) will meet Tonganoxie’s Patterson Starcher (31-12) in the opening round.

Freshman Ryan Adams (35-10) will have a tough first round matchup when he faces off with senior Dalton Carley (33-4) from Wamego at 138 pounds. Sophomore Mason Koechner (38-12) might have the toughest first round opponent of all as he meets Colby’s Austin Hart (34-5) at 220 pounds. Hart is also a regional champion.

“This is the first trip for all five wrestlers, but we’ve been stressing to them all week that we’re not just making the trip

to Salina for fun," Bovaird said. "We're going there to win some medals. Every one of our guys has a chance to win matches, and if they apply themselves and get focused, they can upset some ranked kids. We've got the ability to bring home two or three medals.

"Ryan Adams and Mason Koechner have been to kids state before, and they've competed on the national level. Anders Vance and Brenton Wrigley are upperclassmen and have the advantage of maturity. Nathan Keegan is making his first trip, but he's a kid who's confident with his abilities."

The top six in each weight class will earn a medal. The tournament will continue at 9 a.m. on Saturday with several consolation rounds before ending with the finals.