

Wrestlers place seven at Baldwin



BALDWIN CITY – The Baldwin Invitational Wrestling Tournament features a gauntlet of state-ranked teams and wrestlers from across the state.

Louisburg seemed to handle that task just fine Saturday as the Wildcat wrestling team placed seven in the top seven to come away with their best finish in several seasons. Although Louisburg placed 10th in the team standings with 110 points, the Wildcats more than made their mark.

“This was our best performance at Baldwin since we started going there,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “I was there as an assistant coach when (Baldwin coach) Kit Harris began the tournament 14 years ago. It was a tough tournament then, and it’s only gotten tougher as the years have passed. We got 10th out of 17, but the range from 10th to fifth place in the team score was about 18 points.

“Any given match could have made a big difference had the outcome gone the other way. I’m pretty proud of how we stepped out there and wrestled. Several coaches whom I’ve known for years were pretty complementary about how the guys looked.”

The Wildcats had three wrestlers who were one win away from competing in the championship round. Senior Brenton Wrigley (195 pounds), sophomore Mason Koechner (220) and junior Anders Vance (285) each finished third.

Vance (22-6) was also honored with the Gorriarian Award, which was given to the wrestler in the tournament with the most pins in the least amount of time. Vance, who was 4-1 on the day, had four pins and two of them were under a minute. He seems to be responding well after being sidelined with a concussion earlier in the year.

His only loss came to eventual champion Kasey Feyh from Wamego, who pinned Vance in the second period. A big victory for Vance came in the second round when he pinned De Soto's Caleb McQuality in overtime.

"Anders is having a pretty good run this season," Bovaird said. "The only major setback was the concussion that caused him to have to sit out two tournaments. I think he's back in the saddle and ready to go, however. He's been such a hard worker in the practice room.

"I've never had a wrestler win that award at a tournament before, so it feels pretty good knowing that we had a very dominant athlete. Anders just didn't match up with the Wamego kid, who's been ranked high at state all year. That kid had a long reach, and he was pretty mobile and fast, too. I think that with some work over the next two weeks, our coaching staff can get Anders ready for that kind of match. When it comes down to it, Anders is pretty fast and mobile, too."



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Louisburg junior Anders Vance works for a pin Saturday during the Baldwin Invitational Tournament. Vance finished third overall at 285 pounds.

In the semifinals of 195 pounds, Wrigley matched up with Baldwin's Jake Katzer in one of the better matches of the day. Wrigley took Katzer, who is ranked No. 4 in the state, to two overtimes before falling in a 7-4 decision and handed Wrigley just his sixth loss of the year.

Wrigley (25-6) didn't let the loss get him down as he responded with a pin of Royal Valley's Jacob Box and then beat Wamego's Shawn Burns in a 4-2 decision for third place.

"We were all pretty disappointed with that loss, but it's great that Brenton is hanging with a kid like that," Bovaird said. "Two weeks ago, Brenton had a 5-3 win over the No. 5 ranked kid from Independence, and now he's going the full distance with another kid who's been ranked all year. Brenton is having some smart matches, and his confidence level is right where it needs to be. He believes that he belongs on the mat with these guys. I see no doubt in his eyes when he goes out to wrestle."

Koechner also left the mat at Baldwin with plenty of positives himself. He became the first Wildcat to reach 30 wins, not only this season, but the first Louisburg wrestler to reach that mark since Austin Hood and Austin Caskey did that in 2012.

The Louisburg sophomore pinned his way to victory in his first matches of the day before getting pinned himself in the semifinals against Smoky Valley's Jarod DeMott. DeMott, who is ranked No. 6 in Class 4A, pinned Koechner in the third period.

Koechner came back to win a 7-5 decision over Baldwin's

Gunther Wehrman and then beat Abilene's Blaise Lehman in a 6-4 decision to finish third.

"His semifinals match was a tough loss against a strong kid," Bovaird said. "By the end of the match, you could see that both kids had been giving it everything they've got. That kid was a senior with just one loss, and Mason is a sophomore with a handful of losses, but also some pretty high-quality wins. I'm excited to see what Mason is going to do with this season, as well as the rest of his career as a Wildcat wrestler."

Nathan Keegan also had a strong outing for the Wildcats at 113 pounds as he finished fifth. Keegan won a 4-2 decision over Baldwin's T.J. Hopper in the fifth-place match and went 3-2 on the day.

Senior Zach Knox (132) and junior Bradley Trageser (285) both finished in sixth place, while freshman Ryan Adams (138) came in seventh.

The Wildcats, which have been plagued by injuries most of the season, now get a little chance to rest up as they get a week off before traveling to Eudora on Feb. 13 and 14 for the Frontier League Dual Tournament.

"We definitely need some time to recover," Bovaird said. "The month of January is always tough on a team, and this season has been one of the most trying stretches. We've lost kids to concussions, a car accident, appendicitis, broken ribs, torn knee ligaments and fractured vertebrae. Plus, it seems like the overall health has been a struggle this season – especially with all the little bugs that have been going around. We just need some time to relax, get refocused, and begin the long haul toward the end of the season."