LHS track returns state qualifiers



Wildcat sprinters (from left) Mason Wilde, Ben Minster and Ashley Ruder get some work in during Monday's practice at Wildcat Stadium. Louisburg track opens its season Tuesday in Leavenworth.

There is nothing Connor McMullen likes more than throwing the discus and he does it pretty well.

McMullen, who finished second at the state track and field meet last season, has even higher goals for himself this season. The Louisburg High School senior would like nothing more than to be the school's next state champion.

He is already well on his way to doing that as he competed in a meet in Dallas, Texas, over spring break and won with a throw of 180 feet, 1 inch. McMullen, who has signed to throw the discus for the University of Kansas next year, is one of the favorites to win state in Class 4A.

McMullen won't just compete in the discus this season for Louisburg track as he will also be one of the team's best in the shot put.

"I think Connor should be the favorite in the disc in 4A," Louisburg boys track coach Gary Griffin said. "He already won

a meet in Texas over spring break and threw 180 feet. I would love to see him break the 50-foot barrier in the shot and score some points in the state track meet in that event."

McMullen is one of several returning state qualifiers for the Wildcat track teams that feature several underclassmen. The boys team has approximately 50 out this season, while the girls feature 30 athletes.

On the boys' side, senior Sean Dennis returns after qualifying for state in two different events a year ago. Dennis made the state meet in the 110-meter high hurdles and the 100-meter dash.



Senior Sean Dennis works on his form in the hurdles. Dennis is a returning state qualifier in the hurdles and 100-meter dash.

Joining Dennis are fellow seniors Mason Wilde and Dawson Christy who have also qualified for state in previous relays and both will help out in the relays again. According to Griffin, Christy will compete in the 400-meter dash and Wilde will also compete in the sprints.

"Sean had a good year last year and came into this season in good shape," Griffin said. "Mason and Dawson have also

qualified for state and I am expecting good things from them.”

Outside of McMullen, junior Parker Cates leads the Wildcats in the field events after qualifying for state in the pole vault last season.

“We are in the process of sorting out our jumpers and throwers, but hope some of our younger kids can step up in those events,” Griffin said. “We have 30 freshmen and sophomores and some are talented enough to help us at the varsity level.”

On the girls’ side, the Lady Cats return two groups of state qualifiers.

Senior Ashley Ruder, juniors Makenzie Kallevig and Megan Lemke, and sophomore Kaitlyn Gaza return after qualifying in the 4×100-meter relay a year ago. All four will also compete individually in the sprints.

“So far the practices have been going great,” Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said. “We have 30 girls out for track and almost all freshman and sophomores. I really like how hard the girls are working and their athleticism. We are really young and could struggle early in the year but we have some strong sprinters and jumpers this year to help carry us.”

In the field events, junior McKinley Mathews comes back after a strong sophomore season that led her to advancing to the state meet in the pole vault. Darrington also expects freshman Bailey Belcher to make her mark in the jumps.

“Bailey is someone who could do great things for us in the jumps,” Darrington said. “Our strength will be on the track this year and think our girls have a lot of potential for a few years to come if I can get the throwers competitive. The throwers are still young with no upper-class athletes but plenty of potential with some young girls. I think by the end of the year we should be competitive in all three throwing

events.”

The Wildcats won’t have to wait much longer to compete as they travel to the Leavenworth Invitational at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Louisburg will also hold its home invitational on April 23.

LOUISBURG HIGH SCHOOL TRACK SCHEDULE

Mar. 31 @Leavenworth
3:30 p.m.

Apr. 6 @ Prairie View (Junior Varsity) 4:30 p.m.

Apr. 9 @ Paola
3:30 p.m.

Apr. 13 @ Chanute (Junior Varsity)
3 p.m.

Apr. 16 @Anderson County-Garnett
3:30 p.m.

Apr. 20 @Paola (Junior Varsity)
3:30 p.m.

Apr. 23 Louisburg Invitational
3:30 p.m.

Apr. 30 @Prairie View
3:30 p.m.

May 1 @Gardner
3:30 p.m.

May 8
@Wellsville
3:30 p.m.

May 12 @Eudora (Junior Varsity) 4 p.m.

May 14 @Baldwin (Frontier League meet) 3:30 p.m.

May 22 @Regionals TBA

May 29 @State (Wichita State University) TBA