

Lady Cats have record-breaking day



Louisburg's (clockwise from left) Kaitlyn Gaza, Makenzie Kallevig, Ashley Ruder and Megan Lemke celebrate after finishing third in the 4×400-meter relay Thursday at the Class 4A regional meet at Prairie View High School. The Lady Cat team qualified for state in 4:17.

LA CYGNE – Records fell for the Louisburg girls track and field team Thursday during the Class 4A regional meet at Prairie View High School.

Whether they were personal or school records, the Lady Cats had strong performances in several areas and they were able to punch their ticket to state in three events.

Freshmen Isabelle Holtzen (pole vault) and Bailey Belcher (200-meter dash) joined the 4×400-meter relay team of Makenzie Kallevig, Megan Lemke, Kaitlyn Gaza and Ashley Ruder as they will all compete in Wichita later this week at the state meet.

Holtzen got the meet started off on the right foot as she put together her best performance of the season in the pole vault. She set a new personal record as she cleared 9 feet and finished in a tie for second place.

“It is very exciting to be able to go to state,” Holtzen said.

“To be honest, state wasn’t even on my radar when the season started. I was just focused on getting better and I got a lot of help along the way from my coaches and teammates. Coach (Kyle) Littrell gave me a lot of tips and worked with me a lot and my teammates were very supportive.”

It was a tight race for the final three spots to qualify for state. Holtzen, along with three other vaulters, including teammate McKinley Mathews, were tied at 9 feet.

None could make 9-6, but what set Holtzen apart is she didn’t miss until that point. Holtzen was perfect until she missed her three tries at 9-6, which helped her with the tiebreaker.

“Coach Littrell told me coming in that first-attempt makes are going to be big because there could be several of us tied at the end and he was right,” Holtzen said. “It was important for me to get off to a good start and luckily I was able to do that.”



Freshman Isabelle Holtzen clears the 9-foot mark in the pole vault Thursday at the regional meet at Prairie View High School. Holtzen finished in a tie for second and qualified for state.

Mathews and Paola’s Samantha Van Hoecke had to go to a

tiebreaker for the final spot to go to state and Van Hoecke won out after she cleared 9-0 on her first attempt.

As for the 4×400 relay team, the four Lady Cat sprinters picked the best time of the year to run a personal best time. The team finished third in 4 minutes and 17 seconds to earn a spot at the state meet.

"We have worked really hard all season for this," Ruder said. "We have pushed all year to get our personal record and we have always come up short. To finally get it now is just sweet relief."

It is not bad considering the team didn't even know who was going to run their opening leg until minutes before the race started. Ruder, Lemke and Kallevig were waiting to hear who would round out the team and ultimately the coaches decided to go with Gaza.

Gaza, a sophomore, had been battling an injury most of the season and is just now rounding into form. As it turned out, it was perfect timing.

She ran a strong opening leg that was a personal best before she handed the baton to Ruder, who stayed at the front of the pack. Then Kallevig waited for her turn.

"My adrenaline was just through the roof," Kallevig said. "I saw Ashley go with the Paola girls and I was ready to run. I am still a little shocked."

Paola eventually finished second, six seconds ahead of Louisburg and Independence won the race in 4:04.

Still a state berth was on the line and Lemke wasn't about to let it slip away as the anchor leg.

"I just pushed so hard in the beginning and I just couldn't let anyone pass me," Lemke said. "It is just so great to see everything come together."

In the sprints, Belcher qualified for state in the 200 dash and did so in impressive fashion. Belcher had the top time in the preliminaries in 26.17 seconds.

That time set a new school record as Belcher broke Kate Combs' old mark of 26.6 seconds. Belcher went on to finish fourth in the finals.

She almost qualified in the 100 dash as well. Belcher had the third best time in the preliminaries at 13 seconds flat, but finished sixth in the finals in 13.07 in what was a deep regional for sprinters.

The six Lady Cat athletes will begin their journey for a state medal Friday when they travel to Wichita State University for the start of the Class 4A portion of the Kansas State Track and Field Championships.

Events will begin at 2 p.m. and will continue into Saturday.