

Wildcats finish runner-up at Tonganoxie



Louisburg senior Chris Turner squeezes Atchison's Spencer Vice during a 138-pound match Saturday at the Randy Starcher Memorial Tournament at Tonganoxie High School. Turner finished fourth overall and the Wildcats finished runner-up in the team standings.

TONGANOXIE – The Louisburg wrestling team is only just three weeks into its season, but the Wildcats are already bringing home plenty of souvenirs to show off their success and it continued Saturday.

For the second time in three weeks, the Wildcats finished runner-up in a tournament – this time it was at the Randy Starcher Memorial Tournament at Tonganoxie High School. Louisburg was second in the team standings with 207 points and Shawnee Heights won the tourney title with 299.

To make it even better, the Wildcats had seven wrestlers finish in the top four of each weight class and five of them were in the top two.

“I’m pleased to be able to bring another plaque home for our display case, but I’m starting to get a little anxious about not getting that first place trophy,” Louisburg coach Bobby

Bovaird said. "I think the team has grown enough that we can start chasing a team title in the near future. Overall, we had an outstanding team effort. All the boys chipped in and contributed team points, and each wrestler won at least one match."

Junior Mason Koechner had one of the more memorable tournaments of his high school career as he won the 220-pound weight class in dominant fashion. Koechner recorded pins in each of his five matches to move his record to 14-3 on the season.



Junior Mason Koechner works for a pin during one of his five victories Saturday in Tonganoxie.

He didn't waste much time either as he had the most pins in the least amount of time for all the wrestlers in the tournament. His five pins took him only a total of 6 minutes and 10 seconds.

"Mason had a great tournament," Bovaird said. "His championship match was against a Shawnee Heights kid who qualified for state last year and won a match at the state tournament. This was Mason's first varsity championship of his high school career, and the team's first of the season. I am definitely proud of that."

"Each of his matches was a great opportunity for him to improve on the mat. He hit techniques we have been working on in practice, as well as moves I haven't seen him hit since middle school. He's opening up quite a bit and enjoying some dominance."

Freshman Hunter Bindi (106), junior Nathan Keegan (120), junior Austin Raetzel (182) and senior Anders Vance (285) all finished just one win shy of a tournament title of their own.

Bindi had two easy wins on the day with a pin and a technical fall, but faced a strong opponent in Shawnee Heights' Barrett Stickelman. It was a tight match into the third period, but couldn't come up with the final takedown in the 8-5 loss.

"Hunter's only loss was to a kid who was runner-up at the state tournament last year in Nebraska," Bovaird said. "It was a close match and Hunter thought he had an opportunity to score the winning takedown and he went for it. Unfortunately it didn't work out, but he saw an opening and went for it."

As for Keegan, he ended his day with a 4-1 mark, including two pins, a major decision and a 6-1 win by decision. His lone loss came to Tonganoxie's Korbin Riedel in an 8-0 major decision.

Vance pinned his way to four wins in the heavyweight division and all four of his victories were in 1 minute and 9 seconds or less. That set up a match with Schlagle's Tylen Wallace for the championship, and despite a tough battle, Vance was pinned in the third period.

"Nathan was pretty dominant most of the tournament, but he ran into a tough Tonganoxie kid," Bovaird said. "Anders really did have a great tournament. The finals match was a tough loss, but he was aggressive and physical; it was just against a kid whose style and body type was something Anders wasn't used to seeing. We'll have one more chance to see that kid in a few weeks at Topeka."

Raetzel found his way to the medal stand for the first time this season as he had one of his best tournaments to come in runner-up at 182 pounds. Although he was pinned in the championship match, Raetzel rattled off three wins to start the day, including a technical fall of Tonganoxie's Kolton McCrary in the semifinals.

"Austin had some good matches, and the thing I like about him is that he's getting more and more confidence each time," Bovaird said. "He's a kid who thinks a lot – a very bright kid – and sometimes that's an obstacle for kids in wrestling. The more matches he wins, the more confidence he gets, and the stronger he is on the mat."

The Wildcats have also had to make changes to their lineup in recent weeks as they found out they lost one of their wrestlers for the season. Sophomore Ryan Adams, who was a returning state qualifier, suffered an arm injury and will have to sit for the rest of the season.

To take his place, Bovaird shuffled his lineup around and called on senior Chris Turner and freshman Blue Caplinger to step in. The changes seemed to pay a quick dividend as Turner and Caplinger each finished fourth to garner their first medals of the year.

Turner moved down to wrestle at 138 pounds, while Caplinger moved up from the junior varsity squad to wrestle at 145 pounds.

"Blue and Chris were both looking at JV roles earlier this season, with both of them being behind Ryan," Bovaird said. "When we looked at our potential lineup and saw an opening at 138, Chris was light enough that it wouldn't be a serious cut at all. After we got news of Ryan's season-ending elbow injury, Blue has done a great job filling in. As a freshman, he's got an 8-6 record, which is pretty good considering the tough opponents he's been up against already."

“Both guys won some gutsy matches to get into the top four this weekend. Chris was put on his back by an Atchison kid, but then he got a surge of aggression after the guy cranked on his shoulder a little too much. Chris was able to channel his anger and catch the kid on his back for the pin. Blue had to beat a kid from Blue Valley Southwest, and won a smart 4-1 decision to secure his place in the top four.”

The Wildcats take a little break for the holidays and then return to action on Jan. 9 for their home tournament – the Wildcat Classic. Matches are set to begin at 9 a.m.