

Tappan, Conklin win state debate title



Louisburg's (from left) Carson Tappan, debate coach Brian Weilert and Curran Conklin pose with their Class 4A 2-speaker state debate championship trophy following the state tournament Saturday at Independence High School. Tappan and Conklin finished 11-0 on the day as they defeated Bishop Miege in a 2-1 decision in the final round.

Photos courtesy of Michelle Holtzen

INDEPENDENCE, Kan. – After 11 rounds and 17 hours of debate over two days, Carson Tappan and Curran Conklin didn't have a lot more left to give.

But around 10 p.m. Saturday, all that hard work paid off for the Louisburg High School duo.

During the Class 4A 2-speaker state debate tournament at Independence High School, Tappan and Conklin were awarded their first state championship after finishing with an 11-0 record.

"We were super excited once we got some sleep and realized what had happened," Tappan said. "We didn't expect to even place, let alone go undefeated and get first."

They weren't the only Louisburg team to come home with some hardware.

Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson found themselves among the final four teams as well. Despite a close split-decision loss in the semifinals, Holtzen and Anderson finished third to win their first state trophy..

"The competition at state is tough," Holtzen said. "There are 72 of the best teams in Kansas participating. We debated 15 hours over the course of 2 days until we finally finished with third. It was a very surreal moment, I am just so thankful to (Coach Brian) Weilert for helping me get this far. He's a great teacher and I know we would not have been able to accomplish what we did this season without him."



Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen (left) and Grayson Anderson pose with their Class 4A third-place state trophy Saturday in Independence.

Weilert was equally pleased with his group of four teams that made the trip to Independence. The team of Garrett Mills and Lexi Shaner, along with Skylar Keaton and Mikayla Quinn, also competed for the Wildcats.

Mills and Shaner knocked off the No. 10 seed to advance to the round of 16, before losing a close 2-1 decision. Keaton and Quinn missed out on advancing to the double octofinals on a tiebreaker.

"This tournament has become so massive over the past few years that navigating it with all the variables in play such as judging and matchups is a tough go," Weilert said. "Kansas debate is so competitive that there are no easy rounds and with the exception of Carson, who has been debating for three years, the rest of the team has had two or less years of debate under their belts. To have this group do as well as they did made me very proud."

Although Tappan and Conklin made their way through the tournament with 11 wins, it wasn't always so easy and part of it had nothing to do with the tournament.

Tappan woke up under the weather on Saturday morning and didn't have a lot of energy. Add to the fact that he lost his voice in the final two rounds, made it an even sweeter victory – one the duo didn't think was possible.

"Going into the tournament we really had no expectation of taking first," Conklin said. "We knew we would do well but we didn't figure we would do that well. Initially, when we won, it hadn't really hit that we won. The excitement didn't come until a few minutes after when Carson turned to me and said, 'Hey, we just won state!'

"The toughest part of the tournament was knowing that every team you hit would get progressively better, and still having to remain in a good mental state."

One of those teams was Tonganoxie, and following the quarterfinal match between the two schools, Tappan thought his day was done.

"Our quarterfinal round was definitely the hardest round,"

Tappan said. "We beat Tonganoxie 3-0 but it felt like we lost 0-3. Luckily the judges bought our arguments. The competition varied in regular rounds, but in bracket play it definitely ramped up."

That included the championship round where Tappan and Conklin squared off with a team from Bishop Miege. The Wildcat squad was awarded a 2-1 decision and the state championship.

Holtzen and Anderson were one win away from squaring off with their teammates for the state crown. They faced the same Bishop Miege team in the semifinals before losing the split decision.

Although what made the run through state tournament special for the Louisburg sophomores was the fact they had never competed together.

"She's a great friend, so I knew her well but we just hadn't had a chance to work together," Holtzen said of Anderson. "We hoped to do well but weren't really sure what to expect."

Anderson was equally excited about the opportunity.

"Isabelle and I were stoked about our run at state and we were extremely proud of our team," Anderson said. "When we started preparing for the tournament, we decided that our goal would be to make it to outounds and go from there."

"I was super proud to be on the Louisburg debate team. Our team had a fabulous showing at state. I am so thankful to be a part of it and I am thankful that we have Mr. Weilert as a coach. I am so grateful that I got a chance to debate at state and I am incredibly thankful that I had Isabelle as a partner."

With all the success the Wildcat team experienced last weekend, the best still may be yet to come.

"It was amazing to see another team, Grayson and Isabelle,

place as well," Conklin said. "They contributed so much to that tournament it was a shame we couldn't have shared the title. Both girls are second year debaters with myself and it is great to see such potential coming out of Louisburg. From what I hear, next year's freshmen will bring a lot to the table and I look forward to seeing what happens."