

Wildcats hope to end state medal drought



Louisburg senior Anders Vance is one of five state qualifiers for the Wildcat wrestling team. The five Wildcats will begin their quest for a state medal tomorrow morning at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

It has been four years since anyone from the Louisburg wrestling team has returned from the state tournament with a medal.

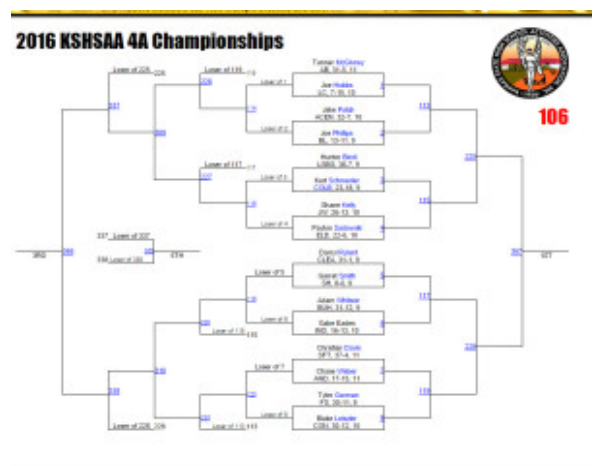
The Wildcats are not only hoping to break that skid this weekend at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships in Salina, but they are betting on bringing home more than just one. It would be the first state medal since Austin Hood's state championship in 2012.

"Several of our weight classes could work out pretty well for us," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "There has been a feeling of excitement in the practice room. It's not over-confidence or cockiness; it's excitement about what we could accomplish. KSHSAA (Kansas State High School Activities Association) does a random assignment when it comes to building the state brackets, and there's a formula that they apply once all the regional results are in. In several of our brackets, I really like how they panned out. I don't want to

jinx us, but it's going to be an exciting weekend."

There is a lot of excitement among the five Wildcat state qualifiers, which includes junior Mason Koechner (39-5), who is currently ranked No. 2 in Class 4A at 220 pounds.

Louisburg also has plenty of chances for a medal. Freshman Hunter Bindi (38-7) won the 106-pound regional last week in Columbus and has emerged as a favorite to stand on the medal podium in his first year at the high school level.



Hunter Bindi – 106 pound bracket

Junior Nathan Keegan (27-10) finished runner-up at the regional tournament at 120 pounds, while senior Anders Vance (43-8) came in third at 285 after recording three pins. Sophomore Thad Hendrix (16-20) will make his first appearance at state at 113 pounds.

Bovaird, along with assistant coaches Robert Ebenstein and Andy Wright, and a few varsity wrestlers, have been working with the five state qualifiers all week trying to prepare them for what lies ahead.

"Our guys are pretty excited for this weekend," Bovaird said. "We've got the potential to bring home some medals. You never know what's going to happen at state, but I've got a good

feeling about this group. Coach Ebenstein, Coach Wright, and I have been floating around the room quite a bit working specifically with our qualifiers on strategies and game plans to win matches.



Thad Hendrix – 113-pound bracket

“At this point in the year, if you want to win a match at state, you’ve got to score points. We need to remind these kids that they need to focus on doing what they know how to do to score points. Sometimes kids forget the simple things like that; they focus on things beyond their control. Our job as coaches is to remind them of what has worked for them all year and to make sure they know how to get out there on the mat and make it happen.”

Bindi will open the tournament against Colby’s Kurt Schroeder (23-18), and should he advance, he will face off with one of two sophomores in Jefferson West’s Shane Kelly (26-13) or El Dorado’s Payton Sadowski (22-6)

“I am excited about it,” Bindi said. “Winning regional allowed me to get a good seed at state. My goal is to be one of the top two kids in the state, so we will see what happens.”



Nathan Keegan – 120 pound bracket

As for Hendrix, since he placed fourth at regionals, will meet a champion from a different regional in the first round. Hendrix will square off with Pratt junior Dylan Pelland (29-3) to open the tournament.

“I am looking forward to it and showing people what I can do,” Hendrix said. “I know this will be my first time going, but I am going to do my best and see what happens.”



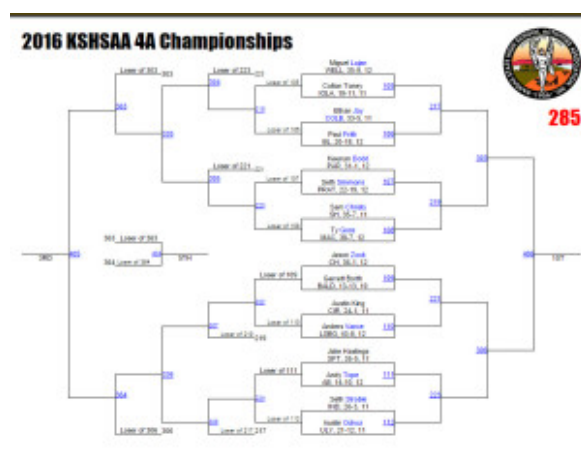
Mason Koechner – 220 pound bracket

Keegan is making his second consecutive trip to the state tournament, along with Koechner and Vance. Keegan, who will face a familiar foe in Baldwin sophomore T.J. Hopper (24-17) in the first round, is ready for a quest at a state medal.

Keegan would face either Pratt's Brayan Balderramma (33-7) or McPherson's Cole Kretzer (24-15) in the quarterfinals if he advanced.

"I think going to state last year will help me this time around because I know what to expect a little more," Keegan said. "I am excited about it and hopefully I can go down there and get a medal."

Koechner has served as the Wildcats' top-ranked wrestler most of the season as he has climbed the ranking at 220 pounds slowly throughout the season. He will get his state tournament going against Hays' Trey VanPelt (26-18) and would meet El Dorado's Cameron Hunt (32-7) or De Soto's Lawson Marshall (16-17) in the quarterfinals if he advances.



Anders Vance – 285 pound bracket

"I think last year I was just happy to go to state for the first time, but this year I am ready to go win some matches," Koechner said. "My goal is to at least get in the top four if not better. I am looking forward to it."

Of the five wrestlers, Vance might face the toughest road to a medal. Vance will meet Towanda Circle's Austin King (24-1) in the first round. King is ranked No. 4 at 285 pounds.

Vance fell to King last year at the state tournament by a 4-0 decision but is ready to show others he is capable of making a run.

“I am looking forward to the chance of beating some people who have beaten me in the past,” Vance said. “There are a lot of good wrestlers there, and it is the state tournament, so there are supposed to be, but I am looking forward to the challenge. It will be fun.”

The action begins at 10 a.m. Friday at the Salina Bicentennial Center and will continue into Saturday.
