

Wildcats send five to state; Bindi wins title



The Louisburg High School wrestling team qualified five for the state tournament Saturday at Columbus High School. The state qualifiers (from left) are Thad Hendrix, Mason Koechner, Nathan Keegan, Hunter Bindi and Anders Vance.

COLUMBUS – “Win or go home” was the prevalent motto going around the Class 4A regional tournament at Columbus High School.

Louisburg didn’t want to see its season come to an end, so it did a lot of winning instead.

The Wildcats qualified five wrestlers for the state tournament following Saturday’s regional and they also had three place in the top two.

Freshman Hunter Bindi (106 pounds), junior Nathan Keegan (120) and junior Mason Koechner (220) each advanced to the regional finals match Friday and secured their spots early. Bindi went on to win a regional crown, while Keegan and Koechner each came in runner-up.

Senior Anders Vance (285) and sophomore Thad Hendrix (113) each had to do some work in the back side of their brackets, but finished third and fourth, respectively. All five

wrestlers will make the trip to Salina on Friday for the Class 4A state tournament.

In all, the Wildcats had six wrestlers reach the 'blood round,' which determines who will make the state tournament in the back side of the bracket. Louisburg finished sixth in the team standings with 111.5 points.

"We were hoping for more (qualifiers), but we had some tough match-ups in the blood round," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "It's definitely a good step for us. I loved the feeling Friday night of having three guys in the finals, and I really liked our chances on the backside with several guys. We finished sixth as a team this year with 111.5 points, but we were fourth last year with 106 points. That's more points being scored this year, which definitely says something about our growth.

"I'm really proud that we were only seven points out of third place. We had lots of first-round byes, which would have been possible team points we could have scored. If a couple things had been different, brackets drawn differently, it could have made the difference. Regardless, we did pretty well with an outstanding group of guys, and I'm nothing but proud of how we wrestled this weekend."



Hunter Bindi won the 106-pound regional title following a 14-11 decision Saturday in Columbus.

It marks the second year in a row for Vance, Koechner and Keegan to earn a trip to state, while Bindi and Hendrix will go for the first time. The Wildcats also matched the number of state qualifiers from a year ago.

"We did pretty good," Vance said. "We got six guys to the blood round, which is the most we have gotten in a long time. I am excited about who we were able to qualify, but I wish we could have gotten more. Guys wrestled as hard as they could, but that doesn't always mean that it works out like you hope it does."

The youngest Wildcat wrestler provided the team with the most success as Bindi worked his way through the 106-pound bracket to win a regional title as a freshman.

Bindi (38-7) pinned Labette County's Joe Hobbs in 47 seconds in the quarterfinals and then defeated Independence's Gabe Eades by a 14-0 major decision in the semifinals. He faced off with Fort Scott's Tyler Gorman in the finals and outlasted Gorman for a high-scoring 14-11 decision.

"It is exciting," Bindi said of the regional title. "I thought I wrestled pretty sloppy and my feet were glued to the mat at times. He probably shouldn't have taken me down that many times, but it turned out ok. Now I can get a good seed at state."

Koechner's finals match at 220 pounds turned out to be against a familiar opponent. The Louisburg junior, who is ranked No. 2 in the state, faced No. 3 Jake Miller from Paola and the two had split the two previous meetings.



Louisburg junior Mason Koechner battles Paola's Jake Miller during the 220-pound regional finals match Saturday. Koechner finished second overall.

Miller got the best of Koechner (39-5) this time around as he lost a 3-0 decision. It was a scoreless match into the third period until Miller got a point for an escape. With time ticking away, Koechner shot in on Miller, but Miller got a takedown in the final seconds.

"We are both state-ranked opponents and earlier in the year he got me by a couple points, then at league I got it together and I pinned him," Koechner said. "It was really frustrating for me to have him beat me by a couple points again, when I know I am capable of winning the match. He is a tough opponent and I just didn't wrestle my best."

It was a unique regional for Koechner, who didn't have to wrestle a match until the semifinals. It was there he met Chanute's Gage Clark, who is also ranked No. 5 in the state.

In his first match of the tournament, Koechner went to overtime with Clark, but earned the pin in the extra period.

"Mason's bracket got a little messed up when a non-seeded kid scratched before the start of the tournament," Bovaird said. "According to KSHSAA rules, if a non-seeded wrestler scratches, they don't redraw the bracket. Mason ended up getting two byes into the semifinals while his opponent had two matches to get warmed up for that match. It was a tough kid, and it was also the same kid that Mason beat last year in the blood round to go to state, so there was more at stake than just the match itself."

Like Koechner, Keegan also had an exciting semifinal match to earn a spot in the finals.



Junior Nathan Keegan made his way to the regional title match at 120 pounds Saturday and finished runner-up to qualify for state.

After pinning Chanute's Brent See in the quarterfinals, Keegan (27-10) went up against Independence's Jeremiah Lawrie and literally held on for a 1-0 decision. After Keegan earned an escape earlier in the match, he held Lawrie to the mat and rode him out for the final seconds.

"I saw there was eight seconds left on the clock and I did not want to go into overtime," Keegan said. "So I just ran and held him down as long as I could."

Keegan met Burlington's Brett Bober in the finals match at 120 pounds, but came up short in a 6-2 decision.

"Nathan has been more focused these last two weeks than I've ever seen him," Bovaird said. "I am really excited for what he

can do at state this week. That semifinal win showed he can ride a kid out, and it showed that he's limber and agile on his feet. Those skills are key for winning matches at state and hopefully winning a state medal."

As for Vance (43-8), he faced a tough bracket of his own as he had two state ranked opponents in his path to win another regional title. After winning a year ago, Vance came up short in his semifinals match against Independence's Seth Stroble, who is ranked No. 4 in the state.



Senior Anders Vance takes down his opponent during his 'blood round' match Saturday in Columbus. Vance finished third overall at 285 pounds.

Stroble caught Vance with a tight overhook on his elbow and eventually pinned Vance in the second period.

"He caught me off-guard with a different move and I wasn't expecting it," Vance said. "I thought if that wouldn't have

happened then the match would have gone a little differently.”

Other than that loss, Vance had a strong tournament. The Lousiburg senior picked up three wins, all by pin.

In his blood round match, Vance pinned Burlington’s T.J. Lang in 51 seconds and then pinned Iola’s Colton Toney in 29 seconds in the third-place match.

“He bounced back with a vengeance with those two pins,” Bovaird said.

As for Hendrix (16-20), he spent all night Friday and Saturday morning thinking about his match in the blood round. After his loss Friday, he went right to the blood round after receiving a bye.

It didn’t seem to affect him too much as he pinned Fort Scott’s Daevin Caldwell in 38 seconds to qualify for state.



Sophomore Thad Hendrix pins Fort Scott’s Daevin Caldwell on Saturday in Columbus. With the win, Hendrix earned a bid to

state.

"This is great," Hendrix said. "I was really, really nervous (Friday) night and (Saturday) morning because I knew that match would be an important one for me. I was glad I was able to go out and show everyone what I could do."

Hendrix was later pinned in his third place match, but Bovaird liked what he saw out of his sophomore.

"Thad qualifying for state was awesome," Bovaird said. "He was in the right place at the right time with his weight class. Consider the fact that Thad naturally weighs less than Hunter Bindi, and he's giving up tons of weight every match. He's competing with stronger kids and when it came down to it, he had to win one key match against the No. 4 seed. Thad was incredibly focused and went after it. He wanted that win badly, and he definitely gave it everything he's got."

As much as the joy as the Wildcats had following the tournament, they also knew they had to say goodbye to some of their wrestlers as their season came to end – including two seniors.

Chris Turner and Zach Jones wrestled their final matches for Louisburg. Turner, who wrestles at 138 pounds, was pinned in the third round of consolation and Jones lost a 7-0 decision in the blood round.

"The blood round is always hard for me as a coach," Bovaird said. "It's one of my favorite rounds of wrestling all year, but it also hurts the most. This year, I had two seniors see their seasons ended early. Chris got caught on his back in the consolation quarterfinals and with less than a second left in the first period, the ref called the pin. There's nothing you can do about it, but Chris knew it wasn't a pin, and I had a clear view to see that his back was up. It's just one of those times when a referee makes a call that leaves everyone shaking

their heads.

“It’s tough for a senior to lose his last match, but even more so when it’s a kid who’s improved so much like Chris has done and when it’s a questionable call like that. Zach Jones went 3-2 this weekend. He left it all on the mat, that’s for sure. I saw some excitement in his eyes after those wins and I was so proud of him. He just ran into a tough kid and couldn’t score the points he needed to score to win.”

Freshman Austin Moore (160) won a pair of matches, while sophomore Kyle Allen (126) and junior Ben Hupp (170) also won a match.