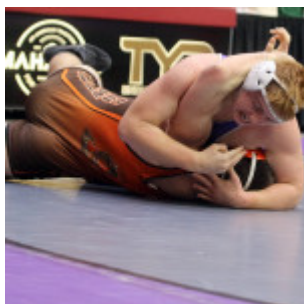


Koechner, Keegan end state medal dry spell



Louisburg junior Mason Koechner puts Abilene's Sam Burt on his back during the third-place match Saturday during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships at the Salina Bicentennial Center. Koechner finished the tournament with a third-place medal and a 5-1 record.

SALINA – It had been four years since anyone from the Louisburg High School wrestling team had walked away with any kind of hardware from the Class 4A state tournament.

That little mini-streak has now ended.

Louisburg juniors Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan each found their way to the podium Saturday following the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

Koechner led the Wildcats as he finished third at 220 pounds and Keegan came in sixth at 120 pounds. Both wrestlers came back from tough quarterfinal losses Friday to rebound with a big day Saturday.

As for the rest of the team, freshman Hunter Bindi (106 pounds) was one victory away from a medal while senior Anders Vance (285) also won a match. Sophomore Thad Hendrix (113)

finished the tournament 0-2.

Louisburg finished 14th in the team standings with 45 points.

“I think the boys all wrestled really well,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They stepped up in the clutch matches and gave it everything they had. It’s been four years since we had a medalist, and it feels great to have that monkey off my back. Ultimately, the credit goes to the guys who get out there and wrestle, but the successes of all our kids have been built with the guidance of the kids wrestling club, the middle school program, and the high school staff.”



Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird is all smiles after Mason Koechner clinched his third-place medal.

Koechner (44-6) was among one of the favorites to reach the championship match at 220 and he got off to a good start Friday with a pin of Hays' Trey VanPelt. Then in the quarterfinals, Koechner found himself in a tough match with El Dorado's Cameron Hunt.

The match was tied at 1-all late in the third period, but Hunt shot in on Koechner to take him down and get two back points to earn the 5-1 decision.

"You can't overlook any opponent at state," Koechner said. "I lost by a couple points on Friday and then coming in Saturday I knew that I hated that feeling and I didn't want to feel it again. I knew what I was capable of and put it all together and it worked for me."

It certainly did as Koechner came back with a vengeance on Saturday. The Louisburg junior racked up four straight victories with three coming by pin and another by major decision to earn a third-place medal.

Koechner started Saturday with a pin of Santa Fe Trail's Gabe Forrestt and then set up a consolation quarterfinal match with Ottawa's Brent Hornbuckle for the opportunity to earn a state medal. It didn't take long for Koechner to secure his medal as he pinned Hornbuckle in just 1 minute and 32 seconds.

That set up a rematch with Paola's Jake Miller in the consolation semifinals. Miller defeated Koechner by a close decision in the regional finals a week earlier, but this rematch wasn't even close. Koechner dominated the match as he won by a 10-0 major decision.

"I didn't have my best week at regionals, but this time I was wrestling well and wasn't going to let anyone stop me, including him," Koechner said.

In the third-place match against Abilene's Sam Burt, Koechner trailed 1-0 in the third period. As he was trying to get an

escape, he hit the mat and rolled onto the top of Burt for a pin and got his fourth win of the day.

“It is awesome,” Koechner said. “Working all season long, and practice isn’t always the best, no one likes practice, but it is all worth it coming out here and medaling.”

His coach couldn’t agree more.

“He had an outstanding tournament,” Bovaird said of Koechner. “I can’t help but wonder if the quarterfinals match was weighing on him Friday afternoon. It’s a huge match – if you win, you are guaranteed a state medal, and if you lose, you have a long road through the back side of the bracket. It’s nearly impossible not to look beyond that one match. The way Mason came back and notched two pins to get into the medal rounds, then to get a revenge win against Paola, and to cap it off with a pin for third place was so exciting to be a part of.”



Louisburg junior Nathan Keegan lifts Independence's Jeremiah Lawrie during their 120-pound consolation quarterfinal match Saturday in Salina.

Keegan (30-13) had a similar experience Saturday as he needed two wins to secure his first state medal. He opened the tournament Friday with a pin of Baldwin's T.J. Hopper and advanced to the quarterfinals against Pratt's Brayan Balderrama.

Balderrama, who ended up finishing third, defeated Keegan by a 10-3 decision and the Louisburg junior had to move to the back side of the bracket on Saturday.

He started off well with a pin of Fort Scott's Kyle Montojo and then moved to the consolation quarterfinals against Independence senior Jeremiah Lawrie with a chance to medal. Keegan and Lawrie squared off in the regional finals the week before and Keegan won a 1-0 decision.

With so much at stake, Keegan rose to the occasion as he defeated Lawrie by a 5-2 decision and wrestled one of his better matches of the weekend to earn a state medal.

"I knew he was going to come out with everything he had and I just couldn't let up," Keegan said. "Overall, I felt that this was one of my better weekends and that is what it is supposed to be because it is state. I wrestled way better than I usually do, and a couple matches I could have done better, but it was still good."

Keegan fell to Burlington's Brett Bober in a 2-0 decision in the consolation semifinals and then lost a 7-1 decision to Tonganoxie's Korbin Riedel in the fifth-place match to garner a sixth-place medal.

"It means a lot," Keegan said of the medal. "This is what I have been working for all season. Once I got that win in the consolation round to medal, that was one of the greatest feelings that I have had in a long time."



Freshman Hunter Bindi works for pin of Abilene's Tanner McGivney during the 106-pound consolation quarterfinal Saturday.

With all the joy of getting two state medals, the Wildcat team also suffered some heartbreak.

Bindi (40-9), who went 1-1 on Friday, moved to the consolation bracket Saturday and pinned Independence's Gabe Eades to advance to the consolation quarterfinals and was one win away from a medal.

He was well on his way to getting it as he held a 7-1 decision in the second period over Abilene's Tanner McGivney, but McGivney locked Bindi up in a spladle and earned the quick pin to end Bindi's season just short of a medal.

"Hunter's loss left me feeling sick to my stomach," Bovaird said. "I know he's a freshman and he's got three more years, but he came so close. He definitely showed up to wrestle that match, building a lead before being caught. It's one of those moves where when you see it happen, you just can't believe it actually worked. In a split second, everything backfired for

Hunter, all because he made one misjudgment in position and his opponent saw an opening for a “funkt” move that you don’t see too often.

“I told Hunter to remember the feeling that this loss left in him; let this loss be the fire that drives him to win three state championships. Despite the heartbreaking end of his season, I’m still very proud of all he did this year.”

The end also came for Vance, a senior, who found himself in one of the more competitive brackets of the state tournament.



Louisburg senior Anders Vance lifts the leg of Towanda

Circle's Austin King as he prepares for a takedown during Friday's first round match in Salina.

Vance opened with a revenge win Friday against Towanda-Circle's Austin King. Vance, who lost by decision to King in the state tournament a year ago, came through with a second period pin. Before that, King had lost just one match all season.

It became more difficult in the quarterfinals as Vance went up against Chapman's Jason Zook, the eventual state champion and was pinned. The loss moved Vance to the consolation bracket against McPherson's Ty Goss.

Goss scored a takedown early and then rode out Vance the rest of the time for a 2-0 decision, which ended Vance's season with a 44-10 record.

"Anders' last match still bugs me," Bovaird said. "His opponent essentially spent nearly four minutes laying on top of Anders, not working any offense. The officials needed to take control of that match. Anders tried his best to get out from under his opponent, and the officials allowed the other kid to get away with little to no offense that entire time. It's very frustrating. Anders racked up 44 wins this season and for the past two years he's been one of the leaders of this program. He deserved a state medal."



Sophomore Thad Hendrix tries to block a shot of an opponent Friday during a 113-pound match.

Hendrix's stay at the state tournament was a short one as he faced Pratt's Dylan Pelland, the eventual state champion, in the first round and was pinned in under a minute. Hendrix (16-22) later lost a 7-1 decision to Jefferson West's Austin Michaelis in the first round of consolation.

The Wildcats also wrote some new entries in the record book as both Koechner and Vance tied the school record with the most wins in a season with 44.

Here are some other accomplishments from the weekend.

- 14th place is the seventh highest finish in team

history; the Wildcats' 45 points is tied with the second most team points scored at the state tournament

- This is the seventh time Louisburg has had two state placers in the same year
- Koechner set the school pin record with 37.
- Hunter Bindi is the first freshman in school history to hit 40 wins in a season.
- Vance moved into seventh place in all-time wins with 93; Koechner moved into eighth place with 91 wins; Nathan Keegan is in 19th place with 64 wins.