

Louisburg wrestling primed for big season



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner will move up to the heavyweight division this season after finishing third at 220 pounds at the state tournament last season. Koechner is one of three returning state qualifiers from last year.

It would be easy for a team to rest on its laurels after it had one of the best seasons in program history.

The Louisburg High School wrestling team qualified five for the Class 4A state tournament, had a state medalist for the first time in four years and won a Frontier League title for the first time in 19 years.

Louisburg took a lot of pride with what it accomplished, but the Wildcats are even more excited for the possibilities this season.

They return three state qualifiers and two state medalists from a season ago, and will boast another full varsity lineup this season that has hopes to contend for another league crown.

“No one should be putting pressure on themselves,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They should be excited about the potential for the season. That excitement should motivate them to work smarter and fight harder to break through to the next

level.”

Seniors Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan, along with junior Thad Hendrix, will lead the Wildcats for the upcoming season as all three are returning state qualifiers.

Koechner, who wrestled at 220 pounds and finished third at state last season, will make up the move up to the heavyweight class this year. The Louisburg senior racked up 44 wins a season ago and Bovaird believes he is primed for another run in the state tournament.

“Mason has been hitting the weights and packing on some more muscle since last season,” Bovaird said. “He’s up to a solid 270 right now and feels pretty comfortable at 285. I think he’s got the bulk and strength to hang with the best heavyweights in the state, and he’s got the agility and experience to beat them.”

Keegan is another returning state medalist for the Wildcats as he finished sixth at 120 pounds last year with a 30-13 mark. Thad Hendrix, who qualified for state at 113 pounds a season, will wrestle at 106 this season after Hunter Bindi – a state qualifier last season – transferred to a different school.

“Thad has experience and maturity working for him this year,” Bovaird said. “Last year he found his stride, but was an underclassman giving up 6-8 pounds to his opponents. This year, he’s an upperclassman fitting right into his weight class. He’s more confident and he’s stronger.

“Nathan is stronger than ever. He’s already certified at 120, and making weight shouldn’t be a concern. He’s not cutting, so he can focus on taking his moves and making them even more deadly than they already are. For both guys, having a steady focus should help them improve even more on last season’s successes.”



Junior Thad Hendrix will compete in the 106 pound spot for the Wildcats this season after qualifying for state at 113 pounds last season.

Louisburg also returns an experienced wrestler who didn't even factor into the Wildcats' success a season ago. Ryan Adams, who qualified for state as a freshman, had to sit out his sophomore season with an arm injury.

Now a junior, Adams hopes to take a big step forward after he

was one win away from a state medal his freshman campaign. He will wrestle at 145 pounds for the Wildcats.

“Ryan is back in stride, almost like nothing happened last year,” Bovaird said. “He couldn’t wait to get back on the mat once his elbow healed. He did more off-season wrestling than anyone else on the team, and it definitely shows with his practice on the mat. It’s been a readjustment getting back into serious wrestling shape, but he’s got the strength to do it. I’m excited for him to have an awesome season.”

They may not have state experience, but the Wildcats return several wrestlers from the 2015-16 season with a lot of varsity mat time.

Going into the season, juniors Kyle Allen (126 pounds) and Tucker Batten (132) will provide some stability as will sophomores Blue Caplinger (160) and Austin Moore (170). Junior Alec Maler (138) along with seniors Dylan Meyer (152), Ben Hupp (182), Austin Raetzel (195) and Terry Allen (220) will also play big roles for the Wildcats.



Senior Nathan Keegan hopes to build off his 30-win and sixth-place finish at state last season.

“Up and down the line, we have some very strong wrestlers,” Bovaird said. “There are 2-3 weight classes where we’ve got some bubble groups as 132, 138 and 170 are pretty deep. Kyle will be a tough kid, as will Tucker Batten. Both of them have had substantial mat time at the varsity level the last two years. Blue and Austin both had winning records last year as freshmen, and both of them are a lot stronger this year. Ben and Garrett Caldwell both did some camps last summer and are ready to do some damage this season, too. Austin will be very strong at 195 – he’s intimidating to look at and he’s got the confidence of being a senior.

“Dylan is back with the program, and with his sheer strength, athleticism, and flexibility at 152, he’ll be looking forward

to a great season. Terry is stepping up at varsity at 220. He's been a very dependable member of the team the last three years, and I'm excited for him to have a shot at varsity now."

The Wildcats will also feature a new addition to their coaching staff as Brandon Ott has come on to serve as an assistant coach along with Andy Wright. Ott graduated from Ottawa High School in 2011 where he was a league champion and went on to wrestle for Ottawa University for two years.

"While losing good kids to graduation is always tough to deal with, it's so encouraging that here we are with a pretty solid line-up this year," Bovaird said. "We have had some depth in the past few years – good young kids getting invaluable varsity experience. The right things are happening for Louisburg wrestling. There's a working system that's bringing solid kids to the high school program. Our coaching staff is able to take them to the next level.

"Andy has been a head coach before and while at Wellsville, he was able to work with some great athletes. Brandon has been a part of a good young collegiate program, and his college wrestling experience is helping us hone our drill series even more. I spent a good part of the summer and fall researching new drills and techniques, watching videos, and talking with coaches of successful programs. I think we're in a good spot with Louisburg wrestling."

Louisburg will kickoff its season Thursday when it hosts Osawatomie for a dual. Matches are set to begin at 6 p.m., and it will also be an alumni reunion as all former Wildcats wrestlers have been invited to return to watch the current group.

The Wildcats will compete in their first tournament Saturday for the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.