

Wildcat debate makes history with league title



The LHS debate 4-speaker team of (from left) Brooke Talmage, Isabelle Holtzen, Greyson Anderson and McKenzie VanMeerhaeghe won the Frontier League title on Nov. 5 in Spring Hill. The four members finished with a combined record of 10-0 to become Louisburg's first undefeated league champion.

The Louisburg High School debate team has challenged itself this season by competing in tournaments against bigger schools and better competition.

That tougher schedule seems to have paid off in a big way as the Wildcats successfully defended their Frontier League title on Nov. 5 at Spring Hill High School. The 4-team speaker team of Brooke Talmage, McKenzie VanMeerhaeghe, Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson went undefeated to win the league championship and made a little history in the process.

The Wildcat quartet made a statement as they became the first 4-speaker team in Louisburg history, and just the fourth in league history, to earn an undefeated league crown. Anderson now has back-to-back titles under her belt as she was lone returner from the league championship team a year ago.

"It meant a lot to me to be a part of the league team," Anderson said. "It was a great group of girls and I was super proud of our performance this year. The fact that both teams

went 5-0, making it an historic showing for Louisburg debate, was stellar and I could not have asked for a better end to that day.”

Anderson joined Holtzen as the two argued on the negative side, while Talmage and VanMeerhaeghe debated on the affirmative side. The Wildcats are being led by first-year coach Claire Haflich as both teams earned five victories on the day, but it wasn't always easy.

Holtzen, who took third at state last season with Anderson in the 2-speaker format, wasn't used to the 4-speaker setting, but it didn't show in the final results.

“The toughest part of the day for me was only debating one side of the argument,” Holtzen said. “Normally I debate both sides in 2-speaker. It was a very different experience, but I really enjoyed it.

“I was super excited when (coach) Haflich asked me to go to league to try to defend our league title. It's super cool to become part of school history and to do it with an extremely talented group of girls beside me.”

Under Haflich, the Wildcat program has decided to compete in tougher tournaments throughout the season, many of which are against Class 6A teams. Although the Wildcats aren't bringing home as many medals or awards as the year before, they hope this will prepare them for the ultimate prize, which is a state title.

“Competing at challenging tournaments has been very beneficial for the growth and improvement of our team,” Anderson said. “We have had a lot of novice move up to open and had very competitive performances. The higher level competition has given us insight to many different arguments, cases and has taught the team the importance of adaptability. I am very excited to see what the rest of the season has in store.”



Louisburg's (from left) Amber Pendell and Janae Kuhlman won the 2-speaker competition on Nov. 5 at Spring Hill, while teammates Sydney and Demi VanMeerhaeghe took second.

Although they didn't compete for a league title, the Wildcats still had several teams who did well in the 2-speaker formats at Spring Hill.

Janae Kuhlman and Amber Pendell finished with a 5-0 record on the day to finish first, while Sydney VanMeerhaeghe and Demi VanMeerhaeghe went 4-1 to take second. Garrett Rolofson and Deven Wieland, who normally compete in the novice division, moved up to the open class and had a 3-2 record to finish third in their first advanced tournament.

The Wildcats have also experienced success throughout the season as Anderson and Nathaniel Mason went 5-0 and finished second at the Spring Hill tournament on Oct. 29.

On Oct. 15, Louisburg traveled to Olathe South where the defending Class 4A 2-speaker state champions Carson Tappan and Curran Conklin went 5-0 to take first, while Skylar Keaton and Holtzen went 4-1 to take fourth. Alex Axmann and Dillon Keegan finished seventh.

The Louisburg novice team went to De Soto on Oct. 8 and finished second overall. Cole Williams and Gabe Rader went 4-1 to finish second, while Calvin Johnson and Sam Kratochvil took eighth.