

Koechner wins title, Wildcats second at Eudora



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner finished in first place in the 285-pound bracket Saturday at the Eudora Tournament of Champions. Koechner was 8-0 on the day with eight pins on the way to the title.

EUDORA – When Mason Koechner walked onto the mat, almost everyone on the Louisburg side knew what was going to happen next.

Most of the time it only took a minute or two. Koechner rolled his opponent to his back. The referee blew his whistle and slapped the mat.

Pin.

Koechner did that eight times over the two-day Eudora Tournament of Champions last weekend and came out on top as he won the heavyweight title with an 8-0 record. He improved his overall record to 14-0 this season with 12 pins.

On Friday, Koechner cemented himself as one of the best wrestlers in Wildcat history as he became the sixth wrestler ever in the program to earn 100 wins in his career. He joins past wrestlers Tim Dozier, Sonny Ewalt, Chad Roberts, Bryce Hood and Austin Hood for the honor.

“Mason is off to a great run so far,” Louisburg coach Bobby

Bovaird said. "Mason grew from a 195-pound freshman into the 220-pound weight class the last two years. He's gotten taller and after a full summer of lifting, he's filled out his weight class pretty well.

"He's the first Wildcat wrestler to reach 100 career wins since I got here. I've been in his corner quite a bit these last four years, but you really have to credit him for all the hard work he's put in, and you have to credit his parents, Scott and Beth, for instilling that mentality in him and being so supportive of his athletics over the years."

Koechner wasn't the only bright spot on the weekend – in fact – the whole team was. Louisburg had its highest finish ever at the Eudora Tournament of Champions as the Wildcats finished second overall with 243 points. Emporia won the tournament with 257.5 points.

Louisburg, which held team lead and several points throughout the tournament, also had 11 wrestlers place in top eight and five finished in the top four.

"It was definitely exciting from the very beginning," Bovaird said. "Because we fielded a full squad, with the exception of an open at 113, it helped us earn points right off the bat. Only one or two other teams had full rosters. I saw from the early rounds that we were doing well, getting lots of pins here and there, but I didn't think we'd be able to compete with Emporia or Tonganoxie once we got into the championship bracket of the tournament. I was very pleased, and the great part about it was the fact that throughout the tournament, the kids kept commenting about where we were at in the team standings. They were getting into the competition and the team title race, and I think that helped their individual performances.

"We've got a lot of wrestlers who have come up through the kids wrestling ranks, but the thing they haven't been a part

of until they get to high school is the team component of the sport of wrestling. These guys have learned how to operate as a team, to care about one another, and to step up and do their part for the team. In other sports, they can disappear with the masses, but in wrestling, it's plain and apparent. Our guys came together just right this weekend."



Sophomore Austin Moore, 170 pounds, finished fourth overall with a 4-2 record in Eudora.

Junior Thad Hendrix found himself in the 106-pound championship match and went on to finish second. Junior Kyle Allen (126 pounds), sophomore Austin Moore (170) and senior Ben Hupp (182) each came in fourth to help lead the Wildcats throughout the weekend.

Senior Austin Raetzel (195) finished fifth overall in his weight class, while junior Tucker Batten (132), junior Ryan

Adams (145) and senior Dylan Meyer (152) took sixth. Sophomore Blue Caplinger (160) and Garrett Caldwell (182) came in seventh.

It all started with Koechner as he breezed his way to the championship match. Koechner, the No. 2 ranked wrestler at 285 in Class 4A, matched up against No. 4 Sam Christy from Spring Hill.

The championship match was a battle until Koechner was able to put Christy on his back late in the third period.

“Mason’s discipline, conditioning and instinct kicked in at the right time and he was able to catch Christy,” Bovaird said. “Sam is an athletic heavyweight, too, but I like Mason’s style up against him.”

Hendrix improved his record to 10-4 on the season as he earned a spot in the bracket with a pair of pins and a major decision Friday. On Saturday, Hendrix defeated Effingham’s Austin Hager by a 4-1 decision, before falling to Wellsville’s Ryan Ware in the championship match, 15-3.

Moore won his first four matches of the tournament at 170 pounds before he went up against Holcomb’s Chance Rodriguez, the No. 3 ranked wrestler in 4A. Rodriguez defeated Moore 11-3, but the Louisburg sophomore bounced back to earn a spot in the third-place match after he pinned Lansing’s James Schafer, but lost to Shawnee Mission East’s William Schmidt, 9-2, to take fourth.

Both Hupp and Allen overcame losses on the first day to find their way to the third-place match.

Allen made his way into the 126-pound bracket and won his first match with a pin of Wellsville’s Ethan Ewing, a state qualifier in Class 3A from last season. After losing in the semifinals, Allen defeated Effingham’s Karl Scholz in a 6-2 decision before losing to Spring Hill’s Noah Nemer in the

third-place match.

As for Hupp, he lost his quarterfinal match to start Saturday, but responded to pin Caldwell and Shawnee Mission South's Caleb Cossairt to advance to the third-place match. Hupp fell to St. Mary's Matthew Cruickshank in a first period pin to take fourth.



Louisburg junior Tucker Batten took sixth overall at 132 pounds during the Eudora Tournament of Champions on Friday and Saturday.

“Those guys all had some exciting matches, and they each stepped up at the right times,” Bovaird said. “Thad wrestled with more confidence than I’ve ever seen him have. His mindset was just like last season at regionals in the match to qualify for state – except more focused, more intense. Even in the finals, against a tough Wellsville kid who placed at state

last year, he was competitive.

“Austin has been a warrior, and being a year older, he’s much more confident and he’s much stronger. That’s a young man who doesn’t make excuses, who battles regardless. Ben is our “comeback kid,” the kind of wrestler who is dangerous up until the final whistle. He lost a tough match Friday night because of a couple mistakes and a constant bloody nose that had to be treated four to five times, but when he had a rematch with the same kid later in the tournament, he came out looking for revenge.

“Kyle Allen has been one of the most coachable kids I’ve worked with here. He’s constantly asking for tips and suggestions, and he is very willing to try new techniques and adjustments. I can ask him to modify a technique he’s been using throughout the years he’s wrestled, and instead of fighting a change to new techniques, he embraces it and gives it a whirl. That mentality has opened up matches for him and especially at Eudora, allowed him to catch and pin a state qualifier.”

The Wildcats did have a few bumps in the road as Batten and Adams had to default out of their fifth-place match. Batten suffered a head injury in his final match, while Adams reinjured his elbow.

Even with some bumps and bruises, Louisburg is gearing up for its final tournament before the holidays as it travels to Tonganoxie on Saturday for the Randy Starcher Invitational.

“I love the fact that on the way home from the tournament Saturday night, I was thinking about how things could have worked out differently in our favor,” Bovaird said. “I was disappointed we didn’t get the team title. It was only three years ago that we just had one kid in the top 8. Now we’re in the hunt for the title. We have a lot of work to do ahead of us, but I’m definitely excited about our prospects

for this season.

“I don't know what to expect this weekend going into the Christmas break. We've got finals, we're banged up, and we're fighting through the bug season. I do know that whomever we put on the mat at Tonganoxie is going to step up and perform.”