

# Louisburg finishes runner-up at Wildcat Classic



Louisburg junior Thad Hendrix won the 106-pound title during the Wildcat Classic on Saturday at Louisburg High School. Hendrix recorded five pins on the day as the Wildcats had eight wrestlers place in the top four.

It had been almost a month since the Louisburg wrestling team hit the mats for any kind of competition.

Due to a postponement of their final tournament before the holiday break, the Wildcats have spent the last 3-plus weeks stuck in the practice room – working against each other.

Needless to say Louisburg was happy to see different competition Saturday and it showed. The Wildcats had a chance to compete in the Wildcat Classic – their home tournament – and put on a show in front of their home fans.

The Wildcats finished second in the team standings and had eight wrestlers finish in the top four. Louisburg recorded 186.5 points to get the runner-up trophy and finished just behind champion Tonganoxie, which finished with 205 points.

“I was telling the guys how in the program’s second season in existence, then head coach Don Meek started the Louisburg Invitational,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “It’s a tournament with a strong history, and as far as I can tell,

our second place finish was the highest finish we've had since 1998 when the team won the tournament. Fifth place is the highest we've finished since I got here. I was very proud of the team's performance Saturday. It's our third team trophy this season, and we're just now nearing the halfway point of the season."

Several Wildcats found their way to the medal stand when it was all said and done, but one stood higher than that rest.

Junior Thad Hendrix responded with a big performance as he won the 106-pound title with a 5-0 record on the day and all five wins were by pin. Hendrix pinned Baldwin's Benton Flory in just six seconds in the championship match to improve his record to 13-4 on the year.

"I'm stoked for Thad's successes this season," Bovaird said. "For two years, he's had to wrestle against heavier kids – he was a light 106-pounder his freshman year and last year he bumped up to fill our 113 weight class – but now he's the big man at 106. He's got confidence and aggression. Even in his finals match, he never let the fact that it was the finals deter him. He got aggressive and went out there to score a 6-second pin to secure the championship."

Teammates Nathan Keegan (120 pounds) and Mason Koechner (285) also made their way to the championship match, but both suffered their first loss of the season and each took second overall.



**Austin Raetzel finished third at 195 pounds Saturday in Louisburg.**

Koechner, the No. 2 ranked heavyweight in Class 4A, squared off with Pittsburg's Kayne Hutchinson – the No. 1 heavyweight in Class 5A, defending state champion and an all-American. The Louisburg senior took a 3-2 lead early in the match on a reversal, but gave up a pair of takedowns as the match went on.

Earlier in the day, Koechner earned a bye and had three pins to improve his record to 17-1 on the season.

"Mason's only had two matches go into the third period this season," Bovaird said. "That's difficult for kids because when they finally get to the third period against a tough opponent, they're not used to the feeling of exhaustion that you only

feel when you're that far into a match.

"Mason handled his match pretty well. I don't think conditioning was a major problem; he was just up against a very tough opponent. Mason was able to get a reversal on him, despite giving up two takedowns. That's going to be a major focus for Mason this season – being strong on his feet."

Keegan saw his first action of the season Saturday and started off strong with four straight wins, including three pins and a major decision. The returning state qualifier advanced to the championship at 120 pounds, but came up short against Tonganoxie's Aidan McClellan in a 10-2 major decision.

"Nathan looked strong in his first four matches," Bovaird said. "In his finals match, I thought he was a little on the conservative side. It's like he was wrestling not to lose, instead of wrestling to win. I'd rather our guys take chances and learn from them now so they're more confident as we get closer to the end of the season. Regardless, it's great having him back on the mat. He's a strong wrestler and is poised to have a pretty good senior season."

Louisburg had five other wrestlers that found their way to the medal stand. Junior Tucker Batten (132), sophomore Austin Moore (170), senior Austin Raetzel (195) each finished third, while junior Ryan Adams (138) and senior Ben Hupp (182) each finished fourth.





**Senior Ben Hupp finished fourth overall at 182 pounds at the Wildcat Classic.**

Batten overcame adversity in his third place match as he went up against Baldwin's T.J. Hopper, a returning state qualifier. Just seconds into the match, Batten suffered a broken nose, but he battled through it and he recorded a takedown late in the third period to get the 2-1 decision.

"Tucker showed a lot of guts by finishing the match the way he did," Bovaird said. "I know how painful a broken nose can be, and he was as tough handling it as I've seen any kid be with a broken nose. That late takedown in his third place match against a state qualifier was a huge step for him. It showed that he can win those tight matches and it showed that he's going to be a competitor this season."

Moore also had a big day as he earned a couple pins before falling to eventual champion – and an all-American – in Prairie View's Joey Ewalt. He responded with an 11-6 decision over Blue Valley West's Aaron Davis in the third-place match.

Raetzel recorded a pair of pins to start the day at 195 pounds, but after two losses, pinned Blue Valley West's Logan Caldwell in 55 seconds to take third.

Adams, who started the season at 145 pounds, moved down to the 138-pound weight class and started the tournament with three wins, including two pins and a technical fall. He later lost his third-place match to Leavenworth's Joey Hancock by an 8-4 decision.

Hupp also had a good day as he won three of his first four matches, all by pin, before losing a 14-7 decision to Pittsburg's Christian Hyde in the third-place match.

Tucker showed a lot of guts by finishing the match the way he did. I know how painful a broken nose can be, and he was as tough handling it as I've seen any kid be with a broken nose. That late takedown in his 3rd place match against a state qualifier was a huge step for him. It showed that he can win those tight matches and it showed that he's going to be a competitor this season.



**Sophomore Blue Caplinger records one of his two pins on the day during his 160-pound match.**

Blue Caplinger (160), Garrett Caldwell (182) and Terry Allen (220) each finished fifth overall, while senior Owen Staver (170) was sixth. Dylan Meyer (8<sup>th</sup>) and Alec Maler (11<sup>th</sup>) also wrestled for the Wildcats.

After three straight losses to start the day, Caplinger ended the day strong as he trailed by nine points in his consolation bracket match, but rallied to pin Baldwin's Scott Harman in the third period.

In the fifth-place match, Caplinger also found himself down five points to Blue Valley West's Drew Anderson, but responded with another third-period pin to avenge a loss early in the tournament.

"I ended up giving our weekly 'Wildcat Award' to Blue for his last two wins," Bovaird said. "He had some tough competition this weekend, starting the day 0-3. In his last two matches, he showed a ton of courage and determination by coming back to pin his opponents."

After being without competition for weeks, the Wildcats have a busy few days ahead of them. Louisburg will host senior night at 6 p.m. today for a dual with Gardner-Edgerton.

The Wildcats will follow that up Saturday when they travel to the Topeka Invitational.

"Normally, when we hit the mats in January, it's a rough start to the new year," Bovaird said. "We've been off the mats for a while, guys are heavier, conditioning is low, and we have to learn the hard way that there's a lot of work to do. Saturday, though, I thought the guys were pretty tough. There's still some conditioning we need to do, but for the most part, we didn't lose matches because we ran out of gas. I'm feeling pretty encouraged about that fact."