

Wildcats pull off win on senior night



Louisburg senior Ben Hupp waits for the referee to call a pin during Wednesday's senior night dual against Gardner-Edgerton at Louisburg High School. Hupp pinned his opponent at 182 pounds and the Wildcats won the dual 45-30.

When Austin Raetzel put his Gardner-Edgerton opponent on his back, the Louisburg bench jumped up with excitement.

With a pin, Raetzel had a chance to secure a dual win against the Blazers on Wednesday during senior night. The 195-pound Louisburg senior didn't quite get the pin, but the victory was good enough.

Raetzel picked up a win during his final home match in an 8-3 decision and cinched the 45-30 win for the Wildcats and moved the team's dual record to 6-1 on the season.

"I loved the way things worked out Wednesday night," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "Not only was it a great feeling to beat Gardner, but to do so with our home crowd was pretty nice. Gardner-Edgerton is a 6A school that's had some tremendous growth and successes over the years. I was pretty proud of the guys for stepping up and winning some clutch matches."

Bovaird also had a chance to watch five of his seven seniors

win their final home match in their Louisburg careers. Mason Koechner (285 pounds), Dylan Meyer (152), Ben Hupp (182) and Raetzel all won, while Owen Staver (170) won two junior varsity matches prior to the dual.

Nathan Keegan (120) ran up against the Class 6A third-place finisher from a year ago in Drake Taysom for a 9-2 loss, while Terry Allen (220) had a hard-fought match but was later pinned.

“The class of 2017 was the first group I got to help coach when I took on the LMS job five years ago, and over the last four years of high school, they’ve grown so much as individuals and as teammates,” Bovaird said. “Two of these guys – Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan – were a part of the team that broke the streak of LHS sitting out at state, and then last year they broke our streak of not having state placers.

“Koechner had a dominant state tournament to take third place and Keegan peaked at the right time and showed us how good he can be to take sixth place. Throw in kids like Owen Staver, Austin Raetzel, Ben Hupp, Terry Allen and Dylan Meyer, and you’ve got a special group of guys right there. They’re hard-working kids who are pretty decent people. There’s never a dull moment around them.”

Junior Thad Hendrix opened the dual with a pin to put the Wildcats on top early, but the Wildcats were open at 113 and the loss at 120 pounds put Louisburg in an early deficit.



Louisburg seniors (front row, from left) Nathan Keegan, Owen Staver, Dylan Meyer; (back row) Mason Koechner, Austin Raetzel, Ben Hupp and Terry Allen.

At 126 pounds, junior Kyle Allen gave the Wildcats the lead back with a pin, but Gardner responded with a pin at 132. Louisburg's Ryan Adams (138) and Dylan Meyer (145) each won by pin to give Louisburg 24-15 at an important time in the match.

Alec Maler (152) was pinned and Blue Caplinger (160) lost a 6-1 decision as Gardner rallied to tie the match.

The Wildcats turned the tide in their next three matches as Austin Moore (170) and Hupp recorded back-to-back pins for a 36-24 lead, before Raetzel clinched the match with his win by decision.

"That series of wins was pretty nice to see," Bovaird said. "Austin Moore has really stepped up this season. He went from a pretty good freshman last year to being a confident, solid force this year. Ben Hupp and Austin Raetzel are also really embracing the confidence of being a year older this season. All three of them have been very dedicated in the weight room, and that physicality has translated great onto the wrestling

mat.

"All three of them did some wrestling over the summer, too, and they're very coachable kids. Hupp and Moore gave us 12 points, but Raetzel's win was a big swing. His opponent was pretty strong, and Austin nearly got the pin in the first period. The good thing was that he held on to the lead and wrestled smart the rest of the match to pull out the win."

At 285 pounds, Koechner, the No. 2 ranked heavyweight in Class 4A ended the dual on a solid note with a pin in the first period.

Louisburg has had its challenges so far this season, but so far the biggest opponent for the Wildcats has been Mother Nature. Due to a forecast for an ice storm, the Wildcats' tournament in Topeka on Saturday was cancelled, which was the second cancellation this season.

Before the holiday break, inclement weather forced the Wildcats to stay home due to the cancellation of the Randy Starcher Invitational in Tonganoxie.

"The cancellations have been pretty disappointing for us," Bovaird said. "I think we could have brought home some team hardware from both Tonganoxie and Topeka, and our varsity guys could have each gotten 7-10 more matches under their belts. I also had some JV kids lined up to compete unattached at those meets, so they lost out on some invaluable varsity mat time.

"Ultimately, though, the threat of ice is nothing to scoff at. Snow is one thing, but ice is another. Totally unpredictable, and the schools played it safe. We're working to set up at least one make-up competition in early February to try to recoup some matches. I've got three or four kids who are sitting right below .500 with their records right now, and I was hoping those tournaments would have given them a good swing to get above .500. I'd like to have our guys with at least 30 matches going into regionals."

Louisburg returns to action Friday when it travels to Parsons for a dual.