

BACK-TO-BACK: Wildcats repeat as league champs



The Louisburg High School wrestling team gathers on the award stand to pose with the Frontier League championship trophy as the Wildcats won their second-straight league crown Saturday at De Soto High School.

DE SOTO – In the week leading up to the Frontier League Dual Tournament, the Louisburg High School wrestling team already had its back up against the wall in a quest to win a second straight league title.

The Wildcats found out they were going to be open two extra weight classes. Louisburg has been open at 113 pounds most of the season, but found out it would be without wrestlers at 138 and 145 pounds.

If Louisburg was going to win another league crown, several Wildcats were going to have to put the team before themselves.

They did just that.

Thanks to the selflessness of a few, the entire team gathered on the award stand following Saturday's tournament and held the league championship trophy for the second consecutive year. The Wildcats went 6-0 in the dual tournament, including key victories over Spring Hill and Paola to pull through.

Louisburg also had 10 wrestlers finish in the top four, while

two won league titles themselves. Senior Mason Koechner won the 285-pound class, while sophomore Blue Caplinger won the title at 152 pounds.

In the process, the Wildcats also recorded the most dual wins in program history as they finished the year with a 20-1 record.

“Going into this season, I wasn’t sure if we deserved the No. 1 preseason ranking for the Frontier League,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Just being realistic and not downplaying our guys, I recognized that the teams in our league are pretty salty and there’s talent all over. Each school had a couple league champs, which is awesome for our sport and our league. It came to overall depth and strength of wrestlers.

“The league champ would be a team that was solid up and down the line-up. I’ve never seen our league tournament so full. This time of year, it seems like a couple teams are really hurting for numbers, but this season we had some really competitive duals and forfeits weren’t as big a factor as they have been in the past. At the end of the day Saturday, I don’t think I could have been any prouder than I was of how the Wildcats came together and pulled off the championship.”



Senior Owen Staver moved up from the junior varsity level to finish third at 160 pounds Saturday at the Frontier League Tournament.

Several different wrestlers made the move to help the Wildcats. Collin Hamilton moved up from junior varsity to wrestle at 138 pounds, while senior Dylan Meyer took the 145 spot.

Caplinger, who had wrestled at 160 pounds all season, cut weight earlier in the week to move down to 152. Senior Owen Staver spent most of the year on junior varsity at 170 pounds, but also cut weight to move down to the 160.

“I kind of not regret not cutting down earlier in the season, but this turned out well,” Caplinger said, “I knew it would be tough, but I knew I could do it and it really worked out.”

It turned out to be beneficial for everyone as Caplinger won

the individual league crown, going 6-0 with six pins, and Staver finished third with a 4-2 record.

“They really stepped up and made sacrifices for the team,” Bovaird said. “Both Blue and Owen had been well within their current weight classes, and the drop to the next lowest weight class for this tournament wasn’t a stretch at all. They just had two days to do it, and it was for a two-day tournament. That meant they would have to make weight not only Friday morning, but also Friday evening – and we had a bye in round two. But they did it. They made the drop, and it paid off big time for the team.

“A week ago, Owen was looking at the end of his season, finishing with a dramatic overtime win to take first place at the Blue Valley JV tournament. Then last Tuesday, he and Blue decided to make the drop for the team. It’s just so exciting for Owen to be able to end on top like that. Collin bumped up to fill in at 138, and he definitely contributed to the team effort. There was the De Soto match where he was losing by a major decision and hit a hip toss and nearly pinned his opponent. Then there was the Spring Hill match where we needed everyone to stay off their backs and not get pinned. Against a tougher, heavier opponent, Collin was able to fight off his back and save the team points.”

Several Wildcats were just one win away from winning an individual league title themselves.

Junior Thad Hendrix (106), senior Nathan Keegan (120), junior Kyle Allen (126), Meyer, sophomore Austin Moore (170) and senior Austin Raetzel (195) each finished second. Senior Ben Hupp finished fourth at 182 pounds.



Sophomore Blue Caplinger won the 152-pound title for the Wildcats with six pins in the two-day tournament.

Koechner, who is ranked No. 1 in Class 4A at 285 pounds, had a big day to lead the Wildcats as he went 6-0 win five pins, including one over No. 6-ranked Sam Christy of Spring Hill.

“It is awesome to have a team filled with a great group of guys, come together and it was great to win another league title,” Koechner said. “We had a lot of guys that made a lot of sacrifices to really help us win this. You had guys like Owen and Blue, and if those guys wouldn’t have cut and went down a weight class, I am not sure what would have happened. We had a lot of close duals, and if those guys don’t make sacrifices then I don’t think that we win the league title.

They put the team before themselves.”

The Wildcats opened the tournament with a 45-21 win over Ottawa on Friday and then ended the night with a big 45-31 win over Spring Hill. Louisburg took that 2-0 record into Saturday where they followed that up with a 60-20 win over Baldwin and 54-29 victory over De Solo.

Then came the dual with Paola, in which the Panthers provided the Wildcats with a stiff test and jumped out to an early lead after Louisburg junior Tucker Batten had to leave with an injury and gave the Panthers six points.

Paola took an early 24-9 lead, but the middleweights came through for Louisburg as Meyer and Caplinger each earned a pin, while Staver won by major decision. Moore provided the Wildcats with another pin to help Louisburg to a 31-24 lead.



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner won the 285-pound league crown Saturday at De Soto High School.

The Panthers won by pin at 182 pound and cut the Wildcat lead to one, which set up a pivotal match at 195 pounds between Raetzel and Paola's Mikey Stribling. The winner would give their team a leg up on the dual – and possibly the league title.

Raetzel came out focused as he dominated Stribling from the start and earned a second period pin to give the Wildcats a seven-point lead. The Wildcats eventually won the dual 43-36 and then secured the league title with a 64-13 win over Eudora.

“The kid I lost to went three rounds with the Paola kid, so that was a little nerve-racking going in to that,” Raetzel said. “I just kept doing what coach told me to do and I was able to get the win.

“Bovaird has really put into our heads that enough isn’t enough and there is always a little bit more that you can do. The team charisma has really been up and we are always taking those extra steps and it paid off.”



Senior Austin Raetzel tries to roll Paola’s Mikey Stribling on his back Saturday during the Wildcats’ dual with Paola. Raetzel won by pin in the second period.

Louisburg has now reached a key point in its season. The Wildcats will travel to Frontenac on Friday and Saturday for the Class 4A regional tournament.

The top four in each weight class will earn a trip to the state tournament in Salina the following weekend.

“I am really excited,” Koechner said. “The season is coming to

an end and we are looking to finish strong. Hopefully we can take a lot of other guys to state as well. We took five last year and hoping we can get eight this year. You never know, we will just see how it goes.”

Bovaird knows his team can accomplish a lot of positives going into the final two weeks of the season.

“This is an exciting time for all of us,” he said. “The guys have the right mindset. After this weekend, there’s excitement and enthusiasm all around, and I can’t wait to see how it translates into the practice room. It’s been a season to remember, but I keep telling the team that we have unfinished business. Never rest on your laurels, but keep on working to succeed down the road. Let the successes we’ve already experienced create enthusiasm and excitement, not pressure.

“They need to keep doing what they’re doing, wrestle their hardest and fight through to the very end, and when the dust settles, we’ll continue to accomplish great things.”

2017 FRONTIER LEAGUE DUAL TOURNAMENT

1st Place – Louisburg

2nd Place – Spring Hill

3rd Place – Paola

4th Place – Ottawa

5th Place – Baldwin

6th Place – Eudora

7th Place – Desoto

Round 1

Spring Hill defeated Desoto 49-24.

Paola defeated Baldwin 49-17.

Louisburg defeated Ottawa 45-21.

Round 2

Paola defeated Desoto 52-24.

Ottawa defeated Baldwin 36-34.
Spring Hill defeated Eudora 63-12.

Round 3

Ottawa defeated Desoto 39-39.
Baldwin defeated Eudora 48-36.
Louisburg defeated Spring Hill 45-31.

Round 4

Eudora defeated Desoto 45-36.
Louisburg defeated Baldwin 60-20.
Paola defeated Ottawa 38-24.

Round 5

Louisburg defeated Desoto 54-29.
Paola defeated Eudora 42-34.
Spring Hill defeated Ottawa 41-29.

Round 6

Louisburg defeated Paola 43-36.
Spring Hill defeated Baldwin 47-20.
Ottawa defeated Eudora 59-21.

Round 7

Desoto defeated Baldwin 46-31.
Louisburg defeated Eudora 64-13.
Spring Hill defeated Paola 34-33.