

Wildcats ready to begin medal quest at state tourney



Louisburg senior Austin Raetzel was one of eight Wildcats to qualify last week at the regional tournament at Frontenac High School. The Wildcats will take part in the Class 4A state tournament starting Friday morning in Salina.

Following Tuesday's practice, Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird took his wrestlers over to the board that listed the program's state medalists.

He listed off several familiar names of Wildcat wrestling lore such as the school's first state champion in Doug Eaton. Then came champions Tim Dozier and Sonny Ewalt. He also talked about medalists like Mike Ewalt, Brian Becker, Tom Dozier and continued down the list of numerous others.

Bovaird wanted to give his eight state qualifiers a blast from the past and let them know what it takes to succeed in the toughest tournament of the season.

"I told the guys how it starts is with a dream of winning a medal, and it takes a supportive coaching staff who believes in them, a determined work ethic to pursue that goal, and a sense of faith in their abilities," Bovaird said. "I think we're right there with all those factors. We just have to get on the mat and do what we've been doing all season long. We need to score points and we need to battle to the last

whistle.”



106-pound bracket – Thad Hendrix

The eight Louisburg state qualifiers will begin their journey to a state medal at 10 a.m. Friday when the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championship gets underway at the Salina Bicentennial Center. The tournament will continue into Saturday.

Thad Hendrix (106 pounds), Nathan Keegan (120), Kyle Allen (126), Ryan Adams (138), Dylan Meyer (145), Austin Moore (170), Austin Raetzel (195) and Mason Koechner (285) will try for a state medal against some of the state’s best wrestlers. The top six in each weight class will receive a medal.



120 pound bracket – Nathan Keegan

"It's been a great week of practice," Bovaird said. "Our qualifiers are focused and ready to go make some noise in Salina. We had a number of guys coming in to work out with the qualifiers – our seniors who didn't make it to state, along with some junior varsity and younger varsity guys. I loved the atmosphere of the room. They're goal-driven and ready to peak at just the right time.

"State is never easy, and the road to a state medal is filled with all sorts of obstacles. I like several of our spots in the brackets, too. I think several guys have multiple possible chances to win tough matches and get in for state medals."

Koechner will lead the Wildcats as he earned his third consecutive spot in the state tournament. He is currently the No. 2-ranked wrestler at 285 pounds following his loss in the regional final last Saturday in Frontenac to Independence's Seth Stoble.

A senior, Koechner (38-2) will have a tough first match as he will face off with Colby's Ethan Jay (35-6) – the defending state-runner up. Koechner finished third at state last season at 220 pounds and is hoping for another good showing this time around.

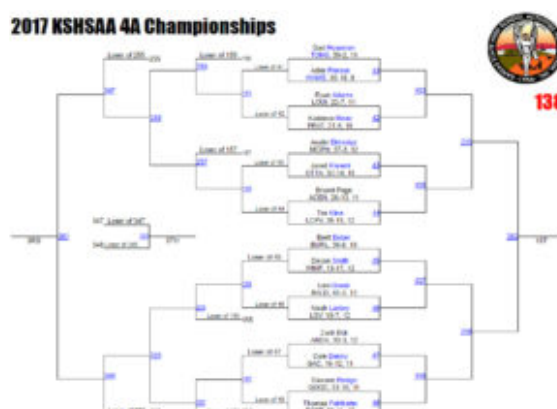


126 pound bracket – Kyle Allen

"Just like last year, I didn't wrestle very good at regionals

and I took second in a match that I probably should have won," Koechner said. "I came back at state and beat the kid I lost to and that is what I want to do this time around. I want to be more prepared than I was this week."

Raetzel, a senior, will make his first state tournament appearance. Raetzel (30-11), who finished as regional runner-up last week, will meet Goodland's Cameron Gray (34-8) in the first round.



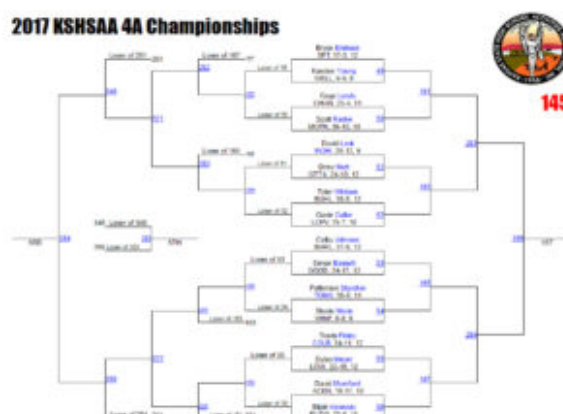
138 pound bracket – Ryan Adams

Adams, another regional runner-up, will make his second state tournament appearance after earning a spot as a freshman. The Louisburg junior had earned a 22-7 record on the season and will meet Pratt's Kadence Riner (21-8) in his first match.

The Wildcats will have a veteran presence at state as Keegan will make his third state tournament appearance, while Hendrix will appear in his second. Allen, Meyer and Moore will compete for the first time.

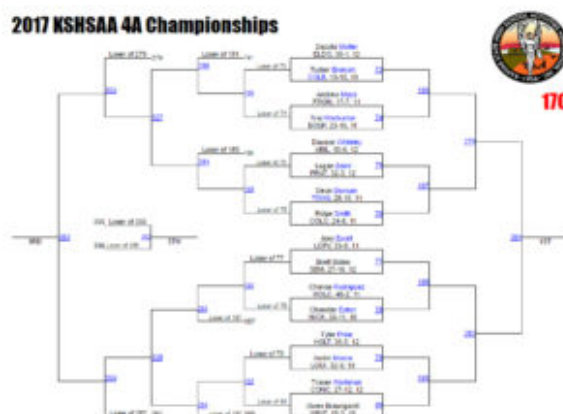
“Mason Koechner, Nathan Keegan, Dylan Meyer, and Austin Raetzel are looking at their last matches this weekend,” Bovaird said. “They all have great stories. Mason and Nathan placed last year. Dylan qualified his senior year, 30 years after his dad Randy did the same thing for LHS. Austin has powered his way into a great position after being JV freshman

and sophomore year and having a chance to prove himself these past two years. The four underclassmen are also in great positions. Thad and Ryan are making their second trips to state, and both have been ranked at various times this year. Kyle is reaping the rewards of all his off-season work, and I told him he's wrestling the best I've ever seen him on the mat. Austin Moore is our youngest qualifier, but he's so strong and determined that he can definitely upset some of the ranked kids.



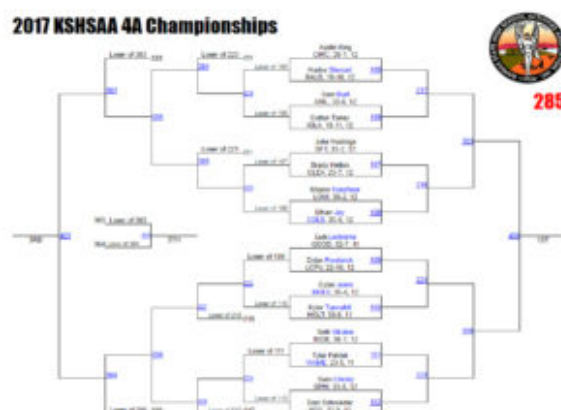
145 pound bracket -Dylan Meyer

“The guys have put their work in, and now it's time to finish what we started this season. At this point, nothing is guaranteed for anyone, and I have full faith that they can all go out there and do some great things.”



170 pound bracket – Austin

Moore



285 pound bracket – Mason Koechner



195 pound bracket – Austin Raetzel