

Wildcat track hopes for big season



Louisburg High School sophomore Chris Williams is one of several returning state qualifiers for the Wildcat track and field team this season. Williams finished ninth at state in the 400-meter dash last season.

The Louisburg High School track teams return their fair share of experience in what the Wildcat coaches hope will be a successful 2017 season.

Between the boys and girls squads, Louisburg brings back three regional champions and several state qualifiers from last season. It is a good starting point for this year as the Wildcats look to try and bring home a state medal after coming up short a year ago.

On the boys side, the Wildcats have 35 athletes out this season, including a pair of individual state qualifiers and three relay teams that earned a spot at the state meet last May.

Like every season, the Wildcats have had to battle with spring break and inconsistent weather to try and get practices in, but they have made progress.

"Things have been going well," Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. "We have some quality kids coming back,

including several relay members from last year.”

One of those individuals is senior T.J. Dover, who won the regional title in the discus a year ago and will look to lead a young group of throwers this season. He finished 11th at state last season, just a few spots away from a medal.

“Because basketball went longer than normal and spring break, T.J. has not had a lot of practice time, but we are expecting him to have a good year,” Griffin said. “T.J. is the only senior thrower and hopefully some younger kids will come along as the year goes by.”

Sophomore Chris Williams will look to lead the Wildcats on the track. Williams, who did a lot of the sprints last season, qualified for state in the 400-meter dash and finished one spot from a state medal as he took ninth.

Williams’ role on the team will be a little different this time around as he will run the 400 dash and 800-meter run and Griffin is excited for what his season could hold.

“I think he has the potential to be a state champion,” Griffin said. “Chris came into practice with confidence and his conditioning is pretty good this early in the season. I expect big things from him.”

The Wildcats will also try and send all three of their relay teams to state after qualifying two last season. Williams will join the 4×800-meter relay of the combination of Wyatt Reece, Tanner Belcher, Owen Staver and Ben Hupp. Reece, Belcher and Hupp all ran on the team at state last year.

On the 4×400 team, Williams will join a combination of Blue Caplinger, Hupp, Belcher and Scott Murphy, while Quinn Rigney, Austin Moore, Jackson Ewalt and Caplinger will compete in the 4×100 relay.

Rigney, Moore, Ewalt, Caplinger, Murphy and Will Ridley will

compete in the sprints this season for Louisburg.

Juniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith, who both qualified for state in cross country earlier this year, will look to translate that success over to the track in the long distance races. Belcher, Staver and Hupp will run in the middle distance, while Hupp will also compete in the hurdles.

In the field events, juniors Kyle Allen and Kristopher Light also return to help lead the Wildcats in the jumps.

As for the girls, the Lady Cats return a pair of regional champs from a season ago in senior Chloe Renner and junior Isabelle Holtzen. In all, they have 27 girls out for track this year.

“Even though the numbers are down I have girls out that want to be here and I think we could be okay,” Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said.



Louisburg junior Isabelle Holtzen hopes to make another state appearance in the pole vault for the Wildcats this season.

Renner comes back for one more season as she won a regional title in the triple jump last year and will lead the Lady Cats in the jumps.

Holtzen also won a regional title last season as she won the pole vault before coming up one spot short of a state medal

last season. She will also concentrate on running in some sprints as well to help her in the vault.

"Isabelle is working hard and I think her doing some sprinting events will help her speed and get her to some new personal records," Darrington said. "She is working hard and I know with her mindset this year she expects more out of herself. I really feel she will be a medal contender at the state meet."

The Lady Cats also return several others in the field events from last year's team. Throwers Ellie Katzer and Lexie Reece will compete in the discus, while Kaitlyn Urban also hopes to have a good year in the jumps.

"I think Kaitlyn Urban has worked hard in the off season and she looks to be more competitive and score points for the team," Darrington said. "Lexie and Ellie have a chance to earn points for the team this year as well."

On the track, the Lady Cats return most of the 4×400-meter relay team that qualified for state last season. Kaitlyn Gaza, Reilly Alexander, Jordon Leach and Mikayla Quinn will lead the Lady Cats.

As for the other two relays, those will be pieced together as the season goes along.

"The 4×100 will have to rely on some younger runners and I am sure Coach (Gary) Griffin will get them ready by mid-year," Darrington said. "Coach (John) Reece will have to rebuild the 4×800 team as a lot of those girls from last year's team made the choice of not coming back out. We will find someone to compete and make a competitive relay team with what we have out."

Both Louisburg teams will open their season Tuesday when they compete in the Leavenworth Invitational, which is hosted at De Soto High School. On Friday, the Wildcats will be in action again, this time at Belton (Mo.) High School for another

invitational.