

Louisburg girls cross country makes history with state bid



The Louisburg girls cross country team qualified for state for the first time in program history Saturday during the Class 4A regional meet in Burlington. Members of the team are (from left) Emily Williams, Carlee Gassman, Kaitlyn Lewer, Trinity Moore, Reilly Alexander, Payton Shaffer and Isabelle Holtzen.

BURLINGTON – The Louisburg High School cross country team has rewritten the history books a lot this season.

However, this chapter might be the biggest one yet.

For the first time in program history, the Wildcats will be sending a team to state as the girls team finished third overall at the Class 4A regional meet Saturday in Burlington. Louisburg finished with 108 points and edged out fourth-place Iola by one point as the top three teams earn an automatic berth to the state meet.

Trinity Moore, Carlee Gassman, Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Payton Shaffer, Kaitlyn Lewer and Emily Williams had some of their best performances of the season as it put them over the top. For the first time in the program's 19 years, a team will represent Louisburg at state.

"My first reaction was 'Wow, we just made history for cross country at Louisburg,'" Alexander said. "I couldn't stop

smiling at the thought that we now would be able to fill a spot on the blank cross country board in the gym. Also I'm so happy and honored to say that I was a part of the first cross country team to make it to state."

The opportunity to go to state was especially meaningful for Alexander and Holtzen, the team's two seniors. Not only was their season on the line Saturday, but it could have been their final race in a Louisburg uniform.

As it turns out, they will get to suit up one last time.



Louisburg senior Isabelle Holtzen sprints toward the finish line Saturday in Burlington.

"Honestly, it just feels unbelievable," Holtzen said. "At practice (Friday) and the day before, coach (John) Reece came

up to all of us during a team meeting and he was telling us that we would have a chance, but that we would have to run our hearts out. I know the entire race, as I ran part of it with Reilly and part of it with Peyton, we were just encouraging each other that this was for state. For it to actually happen is just outstanding.”

Following the race, there was some confusion on how the final results were going to shake out. The original results showed Louisburg finished second overall, and when the team was informed, they were ecstatic.

A few moments later, it was found that a runner from another team was missing, which meant they had to recalculate the points. It left for some tense moments among the Lady Cat runners.

When all was said and done, the Lady Cats still secured their state berth. Fort Scott finished first in the team standings with 61 points and Anderson County was runner-up with 85.

“I was extremely nervous,” Holtzen said. “We have been looking at different ranking web sites and it had us ranked fourth in all of them. When we first found out that we had gotten second, it was just amazing. We were freaking out and were just super excited. I was just so happy that I was crying, everyone else was crying and we were hugging. Then to have it taken away was really scary. I was just happy to get third and to be able to go.”

Moore led the Lady Cats as she ran toward the front of the pack for the entire race. She passed several runners in the final mile to eventually finish third individually with a time of 20 minutes and 24 seconds.



Kaitlyn Lewer (left) and Trinity Moore give hugs to their teammates to celebrate their state berth Saturday.

Moore, a sophomore, will make her second consecutive trip to state after she finished 19th overall and earned a state medal.

"It feels really good to be going to state again, but it feels even better to go as a team," Moore said. "The race was really, really fast. I didn't realize it when we hit the two-mile mark that I had less than a mile to go, so I had to make my move.

"I just had to make sure I had enough energy to finish in the end and it took some hard work to get up there. I hope I can go to state and do what I did last year and hopefully pass some girls at the end. Hopefully our team can do well, too."

Gassman was second on the Lady Cat team with a time of 21:39 and finished 14th overall. Holtzen ran a 22:29, which was her

best time of the season, and took 27th.

Alexander, who finished 32nd, ran a personal best time of 22:54. Shaffer also recorded a personal best of 23:11 and took 38th.



Senior Reilly Alexander leads a pack of runners around a turn Saturday at the Class 4A regional race in Burlington.

“The regional race for me was one of the toughest mentally,” Alexander said. “Thankfully I knew the course from the year prior, but the thought of my teammates counting on me to do my best really helped me push to go my hardest. I was able to work with Isabelle towards the end of the race and we pushed each other to finish out our potentially last race of our senior year”

Lewer (23:23), who ran a season best, and Williams (24:16) rounded out the Lady Cat team in 43rd and 58th, respectively.

Louisburg will take part in one final race Saturday when it travels to Wamego for the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships. The girls race will start at 10 a.m. at the Wamego Country Club.

“We have had teams with opportunities, but for one reason or another it just hadn’t worked out,” coach Reece said. “This year, the opportunity was there and from the start of the race they worked very hard. The monkey is kind of off our back now. We can go (to state) and have fun. We ran at Wamego earlier in the year, so they know exactly what they are getting in to. It is going to be a good week.”