

OPINION: Louisburg cross country was at its best in 2017



The Louisburg High School girls cross country team qualified for state for the first time ever this season and the Lady Cats were just one of several program changing moments in 2017.

For almost 15 years, I have had the opportunity to cover high school athletics and have seen most everything.

From state championship teams to teams struggling to just get a few wins, I thought I had witnessed it all. That was until this year.

The Louisburg High School cross country team opened my eyes as it put together its best season in the program's 19-year history. Cross country, up until recently, was a sport where I haven't had the chance to write about a lot successful runners.

There would be years where Louisburg would struggle to just get someone to state. That in itself is a difficult accomplishment, but the Wildcats just weren't blessed with many gifted runners.

Well, this season, their cup runneth over – no pun intended.

The 2017 campaign will go down as one to remember for the Wildcat cross country team and for good reason. This team pales in comparison to any of the previous 18.

All season, the Wildcats made history wherever you looked and it started with sophomore Trinity Moore.

A year after becoming the school's first female state medalist, Moore took her performance to a whole other level. She won the Frontier League title to become the first runner in school history to do so, then two weeks later, Moore broke her own school record as she finished fifth at the Class 4A state meet in Wamego.



Trinity Moore set school history this season as she became Louisburg's first league champion and a two-time state medalist as a sophomore.

Moore also tied Jason Rose for the best state finish in

Louisburg history as he also took fifth in 2006.

A week before the state meet, Moore and the rest of the Lady Cat runners took a big step forward. Moore, Carlee Gassman, Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams became the first Louisburg team to qualify for state in the program's 19 years.

"This was by far the best group of kids we have had yet," Louisburg coach John Reece said. "Coach A (Arianne Seidl) and I really had a great time working with these runners and this year is one for the record books."

All that success didn't stop with the girls, either.

Seniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith provided each other with great competition throughout the season as both runners pushed each other. It often became a toss-up on who would beat the other.

During the Frontier League Championships, Reece recorded the highest league finish in Louisburg boys history as he took runner-up honors. This was a week after Reece edged Smith at the finish to win the Louisburg Invitational.

At regionals, it was Smith's turn as he became the first regional champion in school history with a personal best time of 16 minutes and 42 seconds.



Tim Smith (left) and Wyatt Reece each made history for the Louisburg boys cross country team this season.

That set up one final race between the two Wildcats and it turned out to be a happy ending for both. Reece finished 11th at the Class 4A state meet, while Smith took 15th overall as both earned their first state medals.

Along with Moore, it was also the first time in Louisburg history where the Wildcats had multiple state medalists in one year.

It seemed everywhere you turned in 2017, a new chapter was being written for Louisburg cross country and they did it in one of the more grueling, underappreciated sports there is out there.

Cross country doesn't get the fanfare of the other fall sports

like football, soccer or volleyball. At most meets, it is mainly just family members of the runners rooting them on to the finish.

It just doesn't have the popularity of some of the others.

If you were to ask a teenager what sport they want to do, many of them aren't going to choose the option of running more than 3 miles in a meet and running around town every day in practice. That aspect of hard work doesn't really speak to a lot of kids.

When I was growing up, I was definitely one of those kids. I always thought people were crazy for wanting to run that far – on purpose. It was craziness.

However, after spending several years around the sport, I have a newfound respect for those wanting to go the extra mile to do something great. The Wildcats certainly put in the extra work this season and it showed.

For me, it was a privilege to witness the best that ever was for Louisburg cross country.