

Final round helps Louisburg debate to third-place finish



The Louisburg High School 4-speaker debate team of (from left) Garrett Mills, Skylar Keaton, Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson pose with their third place state trophy on Jan. 13 following the state tournament in Coffeyville.

Skylar Keaton, Garrett Mills, Grayson Anderson and Isabelle Holtzen had about enough.

On the final day of the Class 4A state debate tournament on Jan. 13, the Louisburg quartet found themselves sitting in the lunch room of a Coffeyville elementary school, losing their patience, waiting to hear their fate after the final round of competition.

If the Wildcats had just one losing ballot in the final round, they could find themselves out of a state medal.

Then they look up to finally see their coach, Claire Haflich, walking towards them and it didn't look promising.

"We are sitting in the commons waiting for the results and we see (Haflich) come striding in to the room," Mills said. "I swear, whatever it was, she looked angry. She was irritated. She told us all to go outside."

"We all thought we lost," Anderson said.

Appearances were deceiving, however, as Halfich informed her team that they won both ballots in the final round, which gave them third-place state trophy.

Emotions were hard to hide as the Wildcats were able to bring home their first 4-speaker state debate trophy in several years.

"If we had dropped both rounds, we would have ended up in last," Keaton said. "The fact the tournament was so competitive this year, and that we were able to place, was very exciting. It was nice to give Halfich her first 4-speak trophy and it is nice to work with three other people instead of just one."

Louisburg finished the tournament with an 8-6 record, and finished just two wins behind state champion, Piper, who ended with a 10-4 mark. Bishop Miede was second at 9-5.

It was a difficult competition for the Wildcats as they were part of an 8-team tournament that featured the best 4-speaker teams in the state. The tournament brought a lot of highs and lows that the Louisburg group had to battle through.

The Wildcats were able to come through in the final round as Mills and Keaton, who argued for the affirmative, and Anderson and Holtzen, who argued the negative, each won their final debate. Those victories pushed Louisburg over the top.

"It was the toughest competition that I had ever faced at one tournament," Holtzen said. "I know when I go to a singular tournament, there could be a couple good teams there, but every team was challenging and they were all well-prepared for their arguments. It was really hard to find a hole in their case."

All season long, debaters from across the state were to argue on the topic of education and the four Louisburg seniors did a lot of research from the beginning of the season. Early on, it

was apparent to Haflich who her 4-speaker team was going to be.

“Three weeks into school, I let them know that they were going to be my 4-speak team,” Haflich said. “Although they didn’t start competing until much later, they really came together and the team did a lot research to help.

“It was incredibly broad topic and there were thousands of affirmative cases. You couldn’t have one theory you can use all year. Every judge wanted specific case evidence so they did an absurd amount of research.”

Before the holiday break, the 4-speaker team competed in their regional tournament and finished second overall to earn a spot at the state tournament. They had limited time to research upon returning to school, and the weather made it even more difficult when the start of classes were postponed due to winter weather.

“State isn’t until after the semester has ended and I don’t have them in class anymore,” Haflich said. “They did a lot outside work. We ended up having a snow day at school, which was one of our last times to work together, so there was a lot of Skype practice debate rounds. I definitely pushed them and I think it paid off.”

This isn’t the first taste of success Louisburg has had in debate. The last two seasons, Anderson and Holtzen finished in third-place at state in the 2-speaker competition and that experience helped make this latest trophy possible.

“I have been honored to have Isabelle as my debate partner the last few years,” Anderson said. “It was also awesome to work with Garrett and Skylar and we really became a close team. It was really awesome to work with this group of people in my last season and it was an honor. I am so excited that this how we get to go out as this is the last debate tournament for a lot of us. We represented our school well, but also our

abilities and school as well.”



Wyatt Axmann, Billie Casebeer, Janae Kuhlman and Jordan Shaner pose with their 2-speaker state medals.

It wasn't the only success the Louisburg team encountered at state. The teams of Billie Casebeer and Janae Kuhlman, along with Wyatt Axmann and Jordan Shaner, each finished among the top 16 2-speaker teams in the state and earned a medal.

The two day tournament was a long one as the 4-speaker team had to compete in three rounds the first day and four more on the second, which left them exhausted.

“You have that adrenaline rush going,” Mills said. “You just have to get locked in and find a groove to make it through all

the rounds. Our first day was pretty good and only lost one. We knew the really tough teams were on the second day, so we knew it was going to be a lot tougher.”

Although the affirmative team of Mills and Keaton lost just one on the first day, Holtzen and Anderson hit a couple bumps in the road on the first day with two losses and they were there was going to be no room for error on the second.

“It was hard for us because we had lost a couple rounds Friday so we went in Saturday knowing we had to win so many rounds for each of us to even have a chance to place,” Anderson said. “We had extra pressure, but Isabelle and I had that our junior year too, so we weren’t strangers to it, but it wasn’t fun either. By the time the tournament was over, we were really tired, but all that stress and anxiety was there.”

All the hard work paid off as the Wildcats left the state tournament with another trophy and a place in Louisburg history.

“I was really excited to represent my school in debate one last time,” Holtzen said. “I know senior year is filled with so many lasts, so it was exciting to go out and leave an impact on our school and leave a mark behind on our last season.”