

# Wildcat wrestlers get advice from NCAA champ during camp



Mark Ellis, a former NCAA champion wrestler from the University of Missouri, spoke to members of the advanced Louisburg wrestling camp earlier this month. Ellis was the camp clinician during the four-day session.

The first day of practice might have been four months away, but members of the Louisburg High School wrestling team, and some younger wrestlers, invaded the practice room earlier this month like it was December.

LHS head coach Robert Bovaird hosted his four-day advanced wrestling camp that went from July 9-12 and he had 37 wrestlers sign up for the session. Bovaird has run camps in the past, but this one was different.

Bovaird got in touch with former NCAA champion wrestler for the University of Missouri, and Division I coach, Mark Ellis and asked if he would come and work with his team for the four day session. It worked out well for the Wildcats as Ellis was able to teach the wrestlers both on and off the mat.

"He's been coaching at the D1 level for a while, and has recently been named Director of the Greater KC Area and Midwest Region for FCA Wrestling," Bovaird said. "He did a little clinic for us last summer, and he's followed the high school team's successes over the past couple of years. I asked

him to come talk to the team right before regionals last season, and he agreed. When he got here, he said the right things at the right time – working on getting kids into the right mindset for the end of the season. I love the message of positivity that he brings.

“One of the main things he preached was the idea of “Life and death and the power of the tongue.” While that’s from Proverbs, it’s absolutely a great way for anyone to approach life. The words you use, the things you say are powerful tools. They can bring great positives or they can lead to horrible negatives. He asked the guys on the team if they were ‘life givers’ or ‘life takers.’ That’s such an important message.”

Ellis also talked with the Wildcat wrestlers about his experience on the mat and his road to becoming an NCAA champion. It was a road that was filled with ups and downs.

“Wrestling is a tough sport as it is, and a positive mindset goes a long way and can truly make the difference in how a kid’s season goes,” Bovaird said. “I’ve seen it happen year-in and year-out – great wrestlers struggle to reach their goals because they’re ‘burned out’ or unable to see beyond the negative. With the ups and downs of the sport, the mixed signals from parents, coaches, and season rankings, it’s tough to stay focused.

“Mark shared a lot of great stories, and he kept revisiting these messages throughout the week. Mark has become a good friend and supporter of the program, and he’s excited to see how we continue to succeed down the road. He’s said that he’ll definitely be back to visit and work with the team.”

Along with the advanced session, Bovaird also held a beginner’s camp that had 22 wrestlers and he was glad to see such a good interest in the program.

Bovaird even tried to change things up and created a little

more competition with the beginner group.

"I copied and adapted a couple ideas from something my son experienced with the British Soccer Camps this summer," he said. "I split the beginners camp into five groups, each assigned an NCAA team name (Iowa Hawkeyes, Nebraska Cornhuskers, Penn State Nittany Lions, Oklahoma State Cowboys, and Mizzou Tigers). Throughout the week, they competed for team points that were awarded based on good behaviors, doing well with the techniques, winning competitions, and more.

"On Wednesday, I had the wrestlers wear their teams' colors, and then on Thursday, I had them make something creative for their team mascot (drawings, sculptures, paintings, etc.). In the end, Team Mizzou were the champs, and the kids really got into the excitement of earning points for the team competition."



**Mark Ellis gives instruction to a pair of younger Wildcat wrestlers during the camp held at Louisburg High School earlier this month.**

As far as the high school level was concerned, several wrestlers have been working hard over the summer. They have attended open mat sessions that were provided and have also attended a few camps in the last couple of months.

Most recently, Louisburg had 10 wrestlers compete in the Sunflower State Games in Topeka and a lot of them found success.

In the high school division, sophomore Cade Holtzen, who is a returning state medalist, finished second in both folkstyle and takedown. Fellow sophomore Ryan Owens was third in folkstyle and fourth in takedown.

Freshman Aiden Barker was second in takedown in his weight class to go along with a third place finish in folkstyle.

In the 14-and-under division, Kaven Bartlett earned first place in takedown and fourth in folkstyle. Jay McCaskill was third in folkstyle and third in takedown for the 12-and-under group, while Canaan Clayton was third in takedown and fourth in folkstyle for his weight class.

Josiah Clayton was second in takedown and third in folkstyle at 8-and-under, while Bo Ballard was third in the folkstyle and third in takedown.

LHS alums Chris Turner and Shea Cox also competed in the 29-and-under division. Turner was fourth in takedown and Cox was fourth in folkstyle.

“It was great mat time for them all. That’s the thing, whether you win or lose, if you compete in the off-season, you’re already a step ahead of your opponents who are doing nothing

on the mat,” Bovaird said. “Each year we’ve encouraged kids to do the Sunflower State Games, the kids who take up the challenge really show improvements the next season.”

As the summer is coming to a close, Bovaird has liked what he has seen from his group. He has seen wrestlers from the high school level on down, that have committed themselves to the sport.

“We’ve had a number of guys on the mats in different ways since school got out,” Bovaird said. “Cade Holtzen, Gabe Bonham, Anthony Davis, and Hayden Hoy attended the “24 Hours with God” camp at Raymore-Peculiar, which was hosted by Mark Ellis and sponsored by FCA Wrestling. They got to learn from premiere clinicians like 4-time NCAA finalist Isaiah Martinez, Mizzou head coach Brian Smith, and Baker University head coach and NCAA D2 champion Cody Garcia.

“I had over 30 different kids come to open mats this summer, too. They ranged from veteran high school wrestlers to some of our 1st and 2nd year wrestlers from the club level. Right now, four of our wrestlers – Holtzen, Kaden Allen (6th grade), Kaven Bartlett (8th grade) and Aiden Barker (9th grade) have earned at least 100 points to become this summer’s “Ironman” award winners, and there are 3-4 more wrestlers in the chase. They’ve gone to various club practices, wrestled in the Sunflower State Games, and attended a few local camps.”

Bovaird also believes the success the Wildcats had last season in qualifying six wrestlers for state, along with the work over the summer, will lead to even bigger things this coming season.

“The summer has been successful so far – busy and time-consuming at times, but it’ll be rewarding in the winter,” he said. “I’m very grateful for the help I’ve gotten from LHS assistant coach Brandon Ott and from Wildcat Wrestling Club coaches Shawn Crossley, Jon Clayton, Adam Noll, Sam Campbell,

James Auth and Janson Lanier. We're really coming together as a vertically aligned program, and in future seasons, we'll be seeing the difference at the high school level. The coaches are great with the kids, they're excited to work with both the youth and the high school wrestlers, and they're committed to making Louisburg wrestling better.

"It's tough getting kids to buy in to the idea of off-season wrestling, especially when a lot of them are playing summer baseball or getting ready for fall football. Wrestling season is still pretty far away for most of them. We're building a wrestling culture here in Louisburg, and I think we're building it the right way – and we're building it to last."