

Wildcats qualify six for state; Moore, Caplinger, Doles win regional titles



Louisburg senior Austin Moore works for a pin of Perry's Hayden Robb during the 220-pound regional title match Saturday in Paola. Moore, along with teammates Blue Caplinger and Brandon Doles, won regional crowns.

PAOLA – It wasn't easy, and nor is it supposed to be, but the Louisburg wrestling team made it look that way at times during Saturday's Class 4A regional tournament at Paola High School.

The Wildcats qualified six wrestlers for state, had three regional champions and took third place in the team standings – all while not being able to field a full team.

Louisburg's talent was certainly on full display during the two-day tournament in Paola. Brandon Doles, Blue Caplinger and Austin Moore won regional crowns, Cade Holtzen was a regional runner-up, while Gabe Bonham and Ryan Owens also qualified for state by placing third and fourth, respectively.

As a team, the Wildcats ended up with 138.5 points and was just 2.5 points out of second place. Ottawa won the regional with 149.5 points and Eudora was second at 141. It was the highest regional team finish for Louisburg since 1998.

“The way these guys wrestled this weekend shows that the program has been doing so many things right this season,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “We’ve had the obstacle of low numbers, which hurt us in our duals, but when it comes to tournament time, we have a bunch of guys who are placing high and that gives us a lot of team points. Taking six to state feels pretty encouraging, and finishing third at regionals is an awesome statement for this team.

“If a few things had gone the other way, we would have been in second as a team. On paper, we weren’t supposed to be in the race for a regional plaque. Almost all of our guys stepped up and scored huge team points for us.”

Moore was certainly one of those wrestlers for Louisburg as he recovered from a broken collarbone before the season started and eventually turned that into a regional title at 220 pounds and a 12-0 record.

The Louisburg senior advanced to the championship with a 7-2 decision over Anderson County’s Dallas Higginbotham

in the semifinals and then responded with a second period pin of Perry-Lecompton's Hayden Robb in the finals.

Moore did have to come from behind against Robb as he found himself down 2-0 in the second period, but got a little extra motivation to help get the job done.

"I knew after I gave up that takedown, I had to come back, stay smart and try not to get all the points back at once," he said. "I tried to circle a little bit better and not get too heavy on my toes. He kind of egged me on a little bit and I was able to put him on his back. Once I got on him on his back, I didn't want to let him up.

"I am really happy to win regionals because when I broke my collarbone, I didn't even know if I was going to be able to wrestle or not. I'm just excited because this is the first time I have won regionals and I know this will help me a lot out at state and put me in a good place in the brackets."



Louisburg senior Blue Caplinger lifts Piper's Branden Martin during the 170-pound regional title match.

Caplinger marched through his 170-pound bracket much of the same way. He pinned his way to the finals, including a third period pin of Prairie View's Hunter Boone in the semis.

In the championship match, Caplinger squared off Piper's Branden Martin, and after getting a close win against Martin earlier in the year, Caplinger controlled the match from the start and won by an 8-3 decision.

"Last year I got fourth at regionals, and this year there was a lot of pressure coming in with the No. 1

seed, but I was able to come in and do what I needed to get the job done,”

Caplinger said. “I am just happy going into state and we will see how everything plays out.

“I feel I did pretty well. I could have done better, honestly. I had some matches where I got a little too tired, but just coming off a concussion that is to be expected.”



Freshman Brandon Doles was all smiles after he qualified for the state tournament Friday after his win in the regional semifinals.

As a freshman, Doles had the regional debut he had hoped for as he went out and won the 145-pound title to secure his first trip to the state tournament.

On Friday, Doles started out with a 2-0 decision over Prairie View's Damien Kline and then followed that up with a

tough 4-2 decision over Eudora's Holden Andrews in the semifinals to cement his state bid.

In the finals on Saturday, Doles squared off with Fort Scott's Jon Daniels and controlled the match for an 8-4 decision.

"It is crazy," Doles said of getting a regional title. "I didn't think I was going to do that well this year since I was a freshman and cutting some weight that I did. I wasn't sure how strong I was going to be. I just did a lot of work in practice to get to where I am right now.

"After the first period in the finals match I was a little gassed, but I had to stay with it. I just started shooting in on him, would get the shot and work through that and kept him on that mat."



Sophomore Cade Holtzen works for a pin Friday during the Class 4A regional tournament in Paola. Holtzen finished runner-up at 113 pounds.

Holtzen also earned a spot in the regional championship at 113 pounds. The returning Wildcat state medalist advanced to the finals with a tough 11-7 decision over Prairie View's Bodi Isenhower.

That set up a rematch between Holtzen and Osawatomie's Chance Mitzner, the No. 2-ranked wrestler in the state, as they both squared off earlier in the year in Baldwin, with Mitzner winning in overtime.

Mitzner also took round two on Saturday when he downed Holtzen in an 11-2 major decision in the finals.

"I really wasn't wrestling my match in the first period," Holtzen said. "I was kind of tense and not taking

shots. I think I just got off my game plan and he got his game plan going and it went his way from there.

“It is still a pretty good feeling to be able to go back again. Hopefully I can place a little higher than I did last year, but it is a pretty awesome feeling.”



Louisburg senior Gabe Bonham finished third overall at 138 pounds and qualified for state for the first time in his career.

Bonham put a nice stamp on his senior season as he qualified for state for the first time. The Louisburg 138-pounder finished the tournament with four pins and his only loss came in the semifinals on a 6-3 decision to Perry-Lecompton's Thad

Metcalfe.

He bounced back from that loss nicely with a pin of Paola' Caden Marcum in the consolation semifinal to qualify for state. Bonham then recorded a first period pin of Fort Scott's Silas Taylor in the third-place match.

"It means a lot to be able to qualify for state," Bonham said. "It has been a long time coming. I should have probably qualified a couple other times, but I was in my head too much. This time, I just went out and wrestled my match.

"I am really proud of all the guys. We have all busted our butts in practice and we get overlooked a lot in duals and tournaments. To be able to take third with only 11 guys is impressive."



Sophomore Ryan Owens gets some back points Saturday during his third-place match at 120 pounds.

Owens, a sophomore who is in his first year as a full-time varsity wrestler, moved up to 120 pounds to start the season and hasn't looked back as he also qualified for state for the first time.

He opened the tournament with a 5-3 decision over Baldwin's Lucas Hopper before getting pinned by Anderson County's Ryland Wright in the semifinals.

Owens bounced back Saturday with a 10-6 decision over Eudora's Larry Gulley in the consolation semifinals, before falling to Atchison's Jake Rebant in the third-place match.

"It feels really good because I wasn't expecting to be where I am at right now, bumping up to 120," Owens said.

"I have learned how to handle to kids who are taller and bigger than me and I feel it has improved how I work in practice. I have to work harder to beat good kids."

Sophomore Ben Wiedenmann finished one win shy of a state berth at 182 pounds. Wiedenmann met Paola's Mikey Stribling in the consolation semifinals, but couldn't get the one last win he needed in a 9-1 loss to Stribling. Wiedenmann finished his day with a 3-2 record.

Senior Brian Houck saw his Wildcat career come to a close with a 1-2 record at 195 pounds and sophomore Jacob Briley was also 1-2 at 160 pounds. Freshman Nathan Hamilton was 0-3 at 132 pounds.

Louisburg will try for state medals this weekend when it travels to Salina for the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships. Friday's opening action begins at 10 a.m. with matches continuing into Saturday.