

USD 416 to offer new sports for upcoming year



The Louisburg High School cross country team will have some company this season as Louisburg Middle School is offering cross country for the first time this year and the younger Wildcats will attend many of the same meets as the high school. LHS will also offer boys and girls swimming this year and have discussed girls wrestling for the future.

There are always changes with every incoming school year, but Louisburg residents will see a couple major ones for the 2019-20 school year on the activities side.

Late last spring, the USD 416 Board of Education approved to add three new activities to the Wildcat sports slate in middle school cross country and boys and girls swimming. All three will give students opportunities to try something different for the upcoming year.

Middle school cross country will coincide with the high school season in the fall and those athletes will attend many of the same meets in 2019. Louisburg will open its season on Sept. 5 at the Anderson County Invitational in Garnett.

The Wildcats will then travel to Wellsville and Prairie View on Sept. 19 and 26, respectively, before wrapping its season on Oct. 10 in Eudora for the Frontier League meet.

There will be separate seventh and eighth-grade divisions for the meets and the middle school runners will run two miles, while the high school will continue to run its usual 5-kilometer course.

Current high school coach John Reece will also serve as the middle school head coach, while Paul Restivo takes over assistant coach duties. It is an exciting time for Reece and the Wildcat program.

"Having a feeder program at the middle school level feeding into the high school level is invaluable," LHS activities director Scott Hinkle said. "Having a feeder program is what builds and sustains successful programs."

Louisburg will also participate in boys swimming, which takes place during the winter season, along with girls swimming that competes in the spring. USD 416 approved to co-op with the current Osawatomie-Paola team during the season, and if any swimmers should qualify for the state meet, they will compete on their own for Louisburg.

USD 416 superintendent Dr. Brian Biermann met with interested swim parents last year and worked with the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) in getting the approval to join the Osawatomie-Paola team for this school year.

Hinkle conducted interest meetings late in the spring with current high school students and

eighth-graders moving
up into high school.

“The students that attended the initial
organizational meeting were very excited and inquisitive,”
Hinkle said. “We had
approximately 24 at the high school meeting – 12 boys and 12
girls. We probably
had 10 or 12 show up for the middle school meeting. Usually
when you introduce
a new sport a lot of kids are interested in hearing about the
new opportunity
and what options are available to them.”

Due to the possible increased numbers for the Osawatomie,
Paola and Louisburg team, there was also a new hire made as
Maddie Carrigan, who is in her first year as a para at LHS,
will be the assistant coach and will help out current head
coach Gerri Hart.

When the addition of swimming was
first announced, there was talk of how to get the swimmers to
and from practice
every day at the Miami County YMCA in Osawatomie. If the
numbers worked, the
parents were going to be allowed to take a school van and do a
rotation
schedule to take the athletes to practice.

However, due to what could be
bigger numbers than anticipated, the district might have to
come up with a
different option.

“We have explored many options in regard to transportation,”
Hinkle said. “We may have gotten real lucky in hiring an
assistant swim coach who could help with the transportation.
If numbers dictate more than a van, then the district is

committed to transport the swimmers in a district school bus. The logistics of all of those factors will have to be worked out.”

Another activity that the district considered adding was girls wrestling. The sport was approved by KSHSAA as a sanctioned sport last April and it became the 23rd championship sport in Kansas.

Although some schools will begin programs right away, Louisburg head wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird knows it might take a little time to get a team put together here.

“I’m pretty excited for girls wrestling to finally become a sanctioned sport in Kansas,” Bovaird said. “I’m on the state board of directors for USA Wrestling – Kansas, and we’ve been seeing huge numbers out for girls wrestling at the youth level. Because of that, we’ve known for a while that it was bound to happen at the high school level. Neighboring schools have been seeing a big interest in girls wrestling, and I hope we’re able to see some of that same interest here.

“Last year, we had five girls join the Wildcat Wrestling Club, and I think it was a great experience for them. As they get older and continue with the sport, I hope to see them bringing their friends to try it out.”

Louisburg won’t be the only district in Kansas where girls wrestling will take time to develop, but Bovaird has a plan in place for current female athletes to begin their journey into wrestling.

"I plan on working with our AD (Hinkle) to set a plan in place to accommodate interest in girls wrestling at the high school," Bovaird said. "For the next two seasons, if a tournament only offers a boys division, then girls will be allowed to compete against male wrestlers. If there is a girls division, then they will compete against females only. After the 2020-21 season, all competitions will be separated by gender. For the time being, we're going to operate as a single program – one practice, one coaching staff, one team, regardless of gender. As numbers grow and we get closer to the 2021-22 season, we'll need to restructure to accommodate the state's requirement for separation.

"We have a history of solid female athletics in Louisburg, and I think the timing is just right for us to expand our wrestling program to include more females. Since I've been here, we've had girls join the team, but never in big numbers. I hope to be able to build a foundation for a solid girls program, especially since I have a 7-year-old daughter whom I'd love to see get the benefits of the sport of wrestling."