

Wildcats return 3 state qualifiers to help lead the way in 2019-20



Junior Cade Holtzen returns to help lead the Wildcat wrestling program this season. Holtzen, along with juniors Ryan Owens, Ben Wiedenmann and sophomore Brandon Doles were all named team captains.

It was successful season for the Louisburg wrestling program last year as the Wildcats sent six wrestlers to state tournament and also brought home a medal.

The Wildcats are hoping for that same type of success, if not more, this time around as they return three state qualifiers to the mix for 2019-20 season. Those are just a few of the reasons why head coach Bobby Bovaird is looking forward to seeing what his team can accomplish.

“Practices have been going smoothly, and I’m excited for the season to get underway,” Bovaird said. “We had our annual scrimmage last night and it was great to see the match-ups. The guys are anxious to get out there to

compete, too. They keep asking about going live all the time at practice. I like that – they're chomping at the bit to wrestle.

"We'll have a solid core of wrestlers. I don't think we'll have as much of a problem this year with guys having to bump up to fill empty weight classes. We have more kids who are new to the sport than we've had in previous years, but they're some solid athletes. They've been picking up pretty quickly."

Juniors

Cade Holtzen and Ryan Owens, along with sophomore Brandon Doles, are returning state qualifiers who will lead the Wildcats this season and were named team captains along with junior Ben Wiedenmann.

Holtzen

earned a state medal his freshman season and was one win away from a second a year ago. Doles was a regional champion a year ago as a freshman, while Owens was also a state qualifier.

With

an early portion of their schedule that will be consisted of duals, Holtzen will wrestle at 132 pounds to start the season and Owens will remain at 120 from a year ago. Doles moves up a class to a 160 pounds and Wiedenmann will take the mat at 170.



Brandon Doles, who won a regional title as a freshman, returns to help the Wildcats at 160 pounds.

“They’ve been working hard in the off-season,” Bovaird said. “Last summer, Cade and Brandon were on the mat quite a bit, and Ben was hitting the weight room pretty hard. Ryan has been keeping active with working out at Louisburg Jiu Jitsu. These four were voted team captains this season, and I’m excited to see their leadership on and off the mat.”

Louisburg will have two open weights to begin the season, 106 and 152, but Bovaird believes they might be able to fill the 152 slot later in the

season.

Freshman Kaven Bartlett will wrestle at 113 pounds, while Luke Kelly will start the year at 126. Senior Harrison Laney (138 pounds), junior A.J. Drew (145), sophomore Aiden Barker (182), senior Hugh Staver (195), senior Sam Kratochvil (220) and freshman Elijah Eslinger (285) will complete the Wildcats' lineup.

Although he may be one of the youngest on the team, Bartlett provides a good deal of experience as he has wrestled in kids club for several years.

"Kaven

is another kid coming into the program who's been wrestling since a young age,"

Bovaird said. "He's a competitive kid and is really coachable. This past

summer, he's been getting into different practice rooms, getting exposure to

new practice partners and coaches. He's got the right mindset to have a very

successful high school career."

The

Wildcats open their season at 3 p.m., Friday at the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.

As excited as Bovaird is for this season, he is just as optimistic about the

future of his Wildcat program.

"Our overall numbers are back up again this year," Bovaird said. "Last year was a fluke with our low numbers, but we also had a very good retention rate. I'm looking to continue that retention and building our numbers back up to where they were a couple years ago. There's the old saying 'Iron sharpens Iron,' and that's true. With more numbers, we'll find the program back on the growing track.

“In 2018-19, there were over 100 kids in Louisburg (grades K through 8) who were involved in wrestling. That includes the area clubs and the middle school program. There’s a wave of strong wrestlers coming in the next few years, and I’m excited to see what this group establishes as a foundation for the future.”