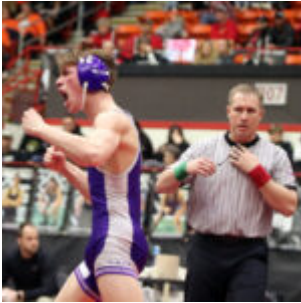


Owens, Holtzen leave Salina with state wrestling medals



Louisburg junior Cade Holtzen reacts after winning his blood round match Saturday at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. Holtzen finished fifth at 126 pounds.

SALINA – Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen both had their own agendas going into the state wrestling tournament.

Owens, qualified for state last year, but left without a win and he vowed to fix that this time around. As for Holtzen, he came up short in his efforts for a second state medal as a sophomore last season and had all the motivation not to come home empty-handed again.

Both wrestlers more than made up for their rough patches a year ago.

Owens and Holtzen left Salina with a state medal during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships on Friday and Saturday at the Tony's Pizza Events Center. Owens made it to the semifinals and wound up earning a fourth-place medal at 120 pounds, while Holtzen finished fifth at 126 pounds.

It also marked the first time since 2016 that Louisburg finished the season with multiple state medalists, when Nathan Keegan and Mason Koechner each brought home medals.

The Wildcats nearly had three medalists as sophomore Brandon Doles finished one win shy of a state medal at 160 pounds with a 2-2 record.

“They both have worked on their mindset training all season, and I’m so proud of how it paid off this weekend at state,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They focused on their strengths and the variables that they control – their attitude, their effort, and their aggression – while at the same time avoiding the tendency to focus on things they can’t control. They both acted like they belonged there at state and deserved a state medal. The only pressure they put on themselves was to continue wrestling how they’ve been wrestling all season and to do their very best. When kids focus like that, they stand a much greater chance of accomplishing their goals.

“These guys (and Brandon included) demonstrated to their teammates that there’s a process they need to work through in order to achieve their long-term goals. Everyone wants to be a state qualifier, a state placer, or state champion, but so many kids don’t know how to set process goals or are

committed to staying the course along the way. These guys are living proof that the process works.”

Owens

caught some people off-guard to start the tournament Friday as he opened with a pin against Abilene’s Kaleb Stroda in just over a minute.



Junior Ryan Owens flips Osawatomie’s Chance Mitzner to his back during the 120-pound quarterfinal match Friday in Salina.

His

biggest upset came in the quarterfinals as he pinned Osawatomie’s Chance Mitzner in one minute to advance to the semifinals and assure himself a medal.

Mitzner, who defeated Owens earlier in the season, was ranked fourth going into

the state tournament and Owens was unranked at the time.

In the semifinals, Owens went up against No. 2 Chadwick Stahl from Mulvane and lost a 5-0 decision, but he had already made a statement with his good start to the tournament.

“Starting off the state tournament with two pins was my ideal start,” Owens said. “I got into a position that I had a good feel for and threw both my opponents to their backs in the first period. I’ve been hitting that move since I was six, so I have a lot of confidence in that position. After my semifinals match Friday, the mindset was that ‘we weren’t finished yet’ and there was still a chance to get the next best thing (third place).”

The upsets continued for Owens on Saturday as he outlasted the No. 5-ranked wrestler, Chanute’s Trey Dillow, in the consolation semifinals in an 8-5 decision to advance to the third place match. That set up a rematch between Owens and Mitzner, but this time Mitzner got revenge as he pinned the Louisburg junior in the second period.



Ryan Owens pumps his fist after securing his first state medal Friday in Salina.

Despite that, Owens was thrilled with his state tournament performance and is already looking forward to next year.

“It felt unreal to stand on the podium,” Owens said. “I had started off my freshman year on JV, and my sophomore year I

had gone 0-2 at state, so being able to lock up a state medal, especially fourth place, was an amazing feeling.

“That state performance let me know where I was at in that weight class and I was very happy with it. However it’s given me more motivation to do more offseason work than ever and it let me know I have a good shot at the championship next year.”

As for Holtzen, he also put together a strong state tournament run, that included a busy Saturday after going 1-1 on Friday. He opened the tournament with a pin of Wamego’s Nick Cruickshank in the third period.

Holtzen, who was ranked No. 6 at 126 pounds coming into the tournament, squared off with No. 3 Braden Ledford of Winfield. Ledford, who went on to finish second overall, defeated Holtzen in a close 3-0 decision.

That loss sent Holtzen to Saturday to look for a state medal. He began consolation action as he edged out Anderson County’s Ryland Wright in a 3-2 decision.



Junior Cade Holtzen scrambles to keep Pratt's Kaiser Pelland down on the mat during the consolation quarterfinal match Saturday in Salina.

Then in the blood round, Holtzen captured a 2-0 decision over Pratt's Kaiser Pelland to assure himself a state medal and it put last year's disappointment behind him.

"My win in the blood round was a moment of pure elation," Holtzen said. "That was everything I've worked for this past year after I promised myself I would never feel the disappointment I felt after losing in the blood round my sophomore year.

"I thought I wrestled pretty well. I wish I was able to score more points

throughout the tournament especially in my quarterfinals match. But that's something I can work on."

Holtzen then met No. 4 Isaac Novotny from Marysville in the consolation semifinals, and nearly had an upset win himself, but lost a 4-3 decision late in the match. The Louisburg junior responded well in the fifth-place match as he pinned Chanute's Colton Seely in the first period

After finishing sixth as a freshman, Holtzen was proud to see himself take another step forward and he is looking forward to have another chance next season.

"To stand on the podium meant everything to me," Holtzen said. "That was my goal coming into the season and to accomplish that shows that all of my hard work paid off.

"This performance this year has made me realize how close I am to the top wrestlers in the state. It's all a point or two difference. That difference has made me understand that I am capable of being a state champion and that will be my goal for my senior year. It is the one thing I have never accomplished in wrestling and something I want to happen before my career is over."



Louisburg head coach Bobby Bovaird (right) and assistant coach Brandon Ott celebrated Owens' quarterfinal win on Friday.

Doles

also made a run at a state medal but found himself on the wrong-side of a loaded 160-pound class.

The

Louisburg sophomore lost a difficult match to start the tournament as he was pinned by Rock Creek's Drew Burenheide, which meant he had a long journey to a state medal wrestling on the back side.

Doles responded with a 7-2 decision over Winfield's Trevin Biddle and then pulled off an upset of Independence's Ian Lawson with a 3-2 victory. Lawson, who was ranked No. 4 coming in to the tournament, had defeated Doles three times this

season.

That

put Doles in the consolation quarterfinals match against No. 3 Cael Johnson of Burlington and Doles was pinned in the second period.

“Brandon

wrestled really tough at state,” Bovaird said. “He was in total control his first match, and about to add to his lead when he got caught. If that hadn’t happened, there’s a very good chance he could have come through on the back side for a state medal. As it was, Brandon had a tough road in front of him and he gave it everything he had. He got a revenge win against an Independence senior who’d beaten him three times this season and then ran into a tough senior who’s committed to wrestle at Baker University next year.”



Sophomore Brandon Doles keeps his opponent on the mat Friday during the 160-pound match in Salina.

With

two state medalists, the Wildcat wrestling program is looking for even bigger

things next season as they return all but one senior from their team and they

hope to make another run at multiple state medals.

“Next year is going to be an exciting year,” Bovaird said.

“We’re only

losing one senior – Sam Kratochvil – and his leadership will be missed. We’re

returning two state medalists and a two-time state qualifier.

There are two

others who had been ranked throughout the season (Kaven Bartlett and Ben

Wiedenmann), as well as two others who made solid runs at regionals (Aiden

Barker, who lost in the blood round, and AJ Reed, who was two matches from qualifying). Their experience and leadership will be a solid model for the new and returning wrestlers to follow.

“We’ll be working to continue building our numbers and to further develop our girls wrestling program next year. There’s a big number of middle school wrestlers who will be joining the program in the next two years, and I’m excited to see what they can do with the foundation that’s being set by our current wrestlers.”