

Wildcat runners ready to try for another trip to state



The Louisburg boys cross country team returns five varsity runners from a year ago and are led by seniors Cade Holtzen (pictured, front) and Carson Houchen.

It was another historic season for the Louisburg cross country team a year ago.

For the third consecutive year, the Louisburg girls qualified for state as team, and one of those runners – Trinity Moore – had the school's best finish as she took third at the Class 4A meet and broke her school record in the process.

Fast forward to the present day and the Wildcats will have a little different look to it. Gone is Moore, who is now a member of the Pittsburg State cross country team, but much of the team still remains.

They may be some of the same names, but they are a year older, a lot faster and there are some new faces mixed in.

Still, the goal remains the same for the Wildcats – to find themselves at the final meet of the year in Wamego for the Class 4A state competition.

“Our end of season goal is a state bid by both teams and it is the same for this year,” Louisburg coach John Reece said. “We will run and have fun and enjoy our time together because we know it can be taken away at the drop of a hat.”

The threat of COVID-19 has every team in the state knowing full well that they can't take anything for granted and the Wildcat runners plan to compete with that mentality.

Louisburg will bring of a lot of experience on both the boys and girls side.

Five runners off the girls state team return to try and make it a fourth consecutive trip to state and are led by returning state medalist, Reese Johnson. Senior Kennady Wilkerson, junior Ruth Minster and sophomores Bree Gassman and Claire Brown could also play big roles on varsity this season.



Junior Reese Johnson, a state medalist from two years ago, will look to make even more impact on the varsity squad this year.

Sophomore Nova Ptacek, who was an alternate on the team last

season, will look to add the depth, as will freshman Lola Edwards as she works her way into the top seven runners.

Other freshmen such as Erin Apple, Madison Rhamy and Madison O'Keefe could all see varsity time as the season goes along.

"The girls team will be solid this year," Reece said. "We return lots of experience and have added some quality freshman to the team. State last year was not what a few of the runners wanted and they are working hard to go back and improve.

"Lola, Erin, Maddie and Maddy, our freshman girls, will add a lot of depth to the team and they could even be varsity runners sooner than later. Lola will be one of our top girls from the start and we will bring her along slowly as she learns to race the 5K."

On the boys side, the Wildcats return much of their starting lineup from a season ago and they are led by a pair of seniors in Cade Holtzen and Carson Houchen, who will be in their fourth year with the program.

Juniors Ryan Rogers, Sawyer Richardson and Caden Bradshaw all steadily improved last season and will look to do the same thing this year as they welcome some new faces to the group.

"Like the girls, we bring back lots of experience in the boys team," Reece said. "Carson and Cade are our seniors and they are stepping up to lead the others. We will be rolling through races together and going for it at the end of the season."

The COVID-19 pandemic has already put its fingerprints on the Wildcats' season as Louisburg was not able to compete in Garnett in its opener this week due to numbers restrictions.

Instead, Louisburg was able to put together a quad competition for Thursday on its home course at Lewis-Young Park. Races are set to begin at 4 p.m.