

TWICE AS NICE: Wildcats qualify both cross country teams for state



Members of the Louisburg state qualifying cross country teams are (front row, from left) Bree Gassman, Claire Brown, Nova Ptacek, Reese Johnson, Lola Edwards, Erin Apple, Maddy Rhamy and Alexis French; (back row) assistant coach Shelby Marten, Braden Branine, Trent Allen, Caden Bradshaw, Ryan Rogers, Hayden Ross, Carson Houchen, Cade Holtzen, Leo Martin, head coach John Reece and assistant coach Erin Davis.

BALDWIN CITY – For the last four seasons, the Louisburg cross country team has seen its program grow over that time and history has been made on several occasions and 2020 has been no different.

For the first time in school history, both the boys and girls cross country teams will be heading to the Class 4A state meet together as both teams finished third Saturday at the Class 4A regional meet in Baldwin City. In relation to that, the boys team qualified for the first time ever and head coach John Reece will have a full roster for Saturday's state meet in Wamego.

"Coming into the meet on paper, both teams were sitting in fourth," Reese said. "We just had to come out here and do what we have done all year long. The boys especially ran together and ran hard. I think they all PR'd and I think that just

shows the team effort that goes into it. For the first time making it for the boys team is awesome and we have two great seniors leading the way and it is an awesome group of kids.

“As for the girls, there wasn’t a senior on the squad, and with that in mind, makes it a lot of fun to see what they can accomplish. They were in the same position, and with Reese (Johnson) coming back from injury to do what she had to do, was great to see. It really was a great day.”

For the boys, getting to state has been a goal for several years, especially for seniors Carson Houchen and Cade Holtzen. Along with Ryan Rogers, Caden Bradshaw, Hayden Ross, Leo Martin and Trent Allen, the Wildcats will step on the Class 4A state course for the first time as a unit.

All seven runners earned personal best times at the Baldwin Golf Course, which led to them earning 91 points and the third place finish. It helps fill a void that, to this point, had been empty.

“It meant the world for our team to earn a trip to state,” Houchen said. “Our goal all four years I’ve been in cross country has been to earn a team spot at state. A joke on the boys team the past three years has been that we would always be in the girls’ shadow because they pretty consistently go to state as a team, so it feels really good to be on the same level as them.



Senior Carson Houchen leads a group of runners up a hill during Saturday's regional race in Baldwin City.

"Our goal this whole year has been to put a name on the only blank state board in the gym. We knew it would be close with Baldwin, but they were running on their home course and we knew we had to race our best to keep up with them. As soon as we finished the race, and I saw how everyone had done, there was no doubt in my mind that we'd made it to state."

Bishop Miege won the regional crown with 22 points, Eudora was second with 57 and Louisburg had 91 to take third. The Wildcats beat Baldwin by 11 points to earn that state trip.

The Louisburg girls also performed well in their third place finish as they took third with 68 points, and were just six points behind second place Eudora as they qualified for state for the fourth straight season. Baldwin won the regional crown

with 31 points.

Louisburg got a pair of strong performances from freshmen Lola Edwards and Maddy Rhamy. Edwards took third overall in 19 minutes and 49 seconds, just 10 seconds off Trinity Moore's school record set a year ago, and has the second fastest time in school history.



Freshman Lola Edwards (left) gains on a Baldwin runner

Saturday during the Class 4A regional race.

"When I found out both teams were going to state, I was at a loss for words," Edwards said. "State has been a goal, not just for myself, but the team as well the entire season. To accomplish that goal has been a great achievement. Going to state is a big deal, especially as a freshman, but I am going to treat it like any other race and run to compete. I am blessed to have this opportunity and to be sharing it with such amazing teammates."

As for Rhamy, she was fourth in 20:29 and it vaulted her to fourth on the school leaderboard with a new personal best time.

"I am so excited to be able to go to state as a team," Rhamy said. "I have really bonded with my teammates this year and I can't wait to run at state with them. I think that it's amazing that I get the opportunity to compete at state as a freshman."

However, it might not have been possible without the help of Reese Johnson. The Louisburg junior has been out the last two weeks with an injury and Saturday was her first competition back.

Johnson gutted out the race to take 14th in 21:09 and helped the Lady Cats secure a spot in the state meet.

"She had to come out and run her race and do well and she did that," coach Reece said. "In no way would I expect a PR from her because she hasn't run for two weeks, but she did what she had to do. She got tight and her legs got kind of heavy there toward the end, but she is a tough kid and she finished it and that is what we needed out of her to accomplish what we did."



Freshman Maddy Rhamy sprints to the finish line on Saturday in Baldwin.

Freshman Erin Apple also made school history as she set a new personal record time of 21:50 in 23rd, which is the seventh fastest in school history. Sophomore Claire Brown was right behind her in 24th in 21:52.

Sophomore Bree Gassman was 28th in 22:12 and sophomore Nova

Ptacek finished 46th in 23:47.

Houchen put together the best race of his career to help lead the Louisburg boys as he finished 10th overall in 17:45, which is good for the seventh-fastest time in school history.

“Carson ran a fantastic time,” Reece said. “What these boys have done all year is that they run their race and this was a prime example of that. Carson and some of the other boys were at 15th or 20th place through that first mile, but since they were running their races, they just moved through the field. It was just one at a time. Considering this could have been their last race for some of them, they definitely ran their best of the season.”

Rogers and Holtzen each recorded top 20 finishes for Louisburg. Rogers ran an 18:28 to finish in 16th, while Holtzen ran an 18:45 to take 20th overall.

Ross (18:46) and Bradshaw (18:47) finished close behind as they took 22nd and 23rd, respectively, while Martin was 25th in 18:54. Allen took 40th in 19:47 to round out the Wildcat lineup.



Senior Cade Holtzen rounds a turn to stay ahead of a Tonganoxie runner. Holtzen took 20th overall.

For Holtzen, the opportunity to go to state his senior year was the perfect way to end what was already a successful senior season.

“To make it to state my senior year meant everything in cross country,” Holtzen said. “Carson and I have been talking about making state since freshman year and to have that come to

fruition as a senior is something I will never forget. We knew that we were on the bubble of third and fourth, but once I crossed the finish line and saw Caden and Ross right behind me, I had a feeling that we were going to state."

Now, the Wildcats will prepare for the final race of their 2020 campaign. Louisburg will take part in the Class 4A state meet Saturday at the Wamego Country Club. The boys will run at 9:30 a.m. and the girls will follow at 10:05 a.m.

"I think both teams are going to run well," Reece said. "A lot of the runners have been on the course the last couple of years now, so they are familiar with it. As far as the girls go, Maddy is the only one that hasn't run on it, but she is such a great runner that she will just hop in with her teammates and she will be fine. I think if we can go down there and be top half with both teams, I would be thrilled with how the season ended."