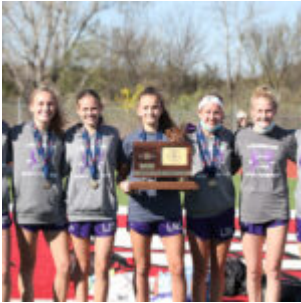


Making HER-STORY: Lady Cats finish third at state



Members of the Louisburg girls cross country team are (from left) Nova Ptacek, Claire Brown, Maddy Rhamy, Reese Johnson, Lola Edwards, Bree Gassman and Erin Apple.

WAMEGO – For 23 years, the Louisburg cross country program has been chasing a top three finish at the Class 4A meet.

The Wildcats have had several teams qualify, especially in the last few seasons, but have always come up short of their goal. Following Saturday’s race in Wamego, the Wildcats can finally stop running after it.

The Louisburg girls put together an historic performance at the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships at Wamego Country Club. The Lady Cats earned a state plaque with a third place finish as they surpassed Buhler by eight points to record the school’s first top three state finish.

Junior Reese Johnson, sophomores Claire Brown, Bree Gassman and Nova Ptacek, along with freshmen Lola Edwards, Maddy Rhamy and Erin Apple, will all go down in school history as they became the first Wildcat team to bring home state hardware.

“It means the world to me to be a part of the first team ever to place at state,” Rhamy said. “Coming into the state meet, I was just hoping our team would be in the top half, so you could imagine my excitement when our team placed third. I didn’t even know we made school history until our coaches told

us.”

Rhamy was one of two freshmen who earned top 10 finishes individually, along with Edwards. Rhamy finished eighth overall in 20 minutes and 58 seconds, while Edwards was right behind her in 10th in 21:02.



Louisburg freshman Maddy Rhamy finishes eighth overall at the Class 4A state meet in Wamego.

Junior Reese Johnson also garnered a state medal as she was 15th in 21:28 to help the Lady Cats to an historic performance.

“It meant so much to me that we got third as a team,” Johnson said. “Honestly it was the best feeling ever, and I’m so proud of everyone, especially our freshman. They really stepped up and got us there. I was very surprised that we got third, and when I heard, I was ecstatic.”

It was a proud moment for many in the Louisburg program, and included in that is John Reece. The longtime Wildcat head coach was all smiles following his team's performance.

"It is 23 years the making," coach Reece said. "You always have the plans and goals to get to state and then you get a group to go to state and do something great. This year was one of those. With the Frontier League as tough as it is, and then getting third there, put it in our heads that maybe we could do this. They all went out and ran their races, and that just shows their grit and determination and who they are."

"They went out and did what they needed to do individually. That is hard to do at a state competition. Your adrenaline gets pumping, sometimes you go out too fast and they didn't do that. They were very composed throughout the race. Maddy, Lola and Reese just kept moving through the field, and I think after the first mile they were like in 20 or 25th place. As the race played out, they were able to move up because they ran their race. It is just incredible."



Freshman Lola Edwards took 10th at the 4A state meet as she was one of three Lady Cats to earn medals.

It was an also an all-Frontier League finish as the top three Class 4A teams were all league members. Baldwin won the state title with 39 points, Eudora was second with 60 and Louisburg was third with 100 points.

They were the teams that battled each other all season and that competition helped the Wildcats throughout the year. It certainly helped the two Louisburg freshmen as they made statements in their inaugural state race.

Rhamy surpassed her teammate Edwards late in the race to take the top spot on the Wildcat team for the first time all season.

"I am very happy about how I ran at the state meet," Rhamy said. "I was ready to run my heart out, and I was so happy to

place in the top ten. I know I will never forget the moment when I crossed the finish line and saw my place. I wanted to do the best I could for the last meet of the season, and I think I did just that.”

Edwards ran a strong race from the beginning as she was in fifth place at one point and was able to secure her first state medal.

“Overall I felt that I gave my all on Saturday’s race,” Edwards said. “Unfortunately I was gone from training the previous week, but I wasn’t going to let that change the way I prepared for the big race. My goal was to finish in the top ten, and I was so happy to reach that goal when I crossed the finish line. It was a great experience and I can’t wait to do it again next year.”



Junior Reese Johnson makes her way up a hill Saturday at Wamego Country Club.

As for Johnson, the Louisburg junior was coming off an injury herself. She missed three meets late in the season, but was able to come back at regionals.

It was that hard work that propelled her to her second state medal after finishing in the top 10 two years ago as a freshman.

“I think I ran alright for being out for a few weeks,” Johnson said. “It definitely could have been better, but it is what it is and I’m very proud. Getting to where I was this year means

a lot to me after having an off year last year. It meant a lot to get that state medal and it was one of the best days of my life. Nothing can beat that feeling.”

The rest of the Lady Cats also ran strong races as Brown finished 49th overall in 22:57 and Gassman was 57th in 23:25. Apple took 67th in 23:42 and Ptacek was 77th in 24:33.

It was also an historic day for the Louisburg boys as the Wildcats competed in their first ever state race as a team.



The Louisburg boys cross country team gets out to a good start in its first-ever state race as a team.

Although, the Wildcats didn't earn a spot on the medal stand, they were still able to put together a memorable season. Senior Carson Houchen led Louisburg in 33rd place with a time of 18:12.

Junior Ryan Rogers was 46th in 18:29 and senior Cade Holtzen

was 56th in 18:46. Juniors Hayden Ross (19:09) and Caden Bradshaw (19:16) took 66th and 72nd, respectively.

Sophomore Leo Martin was 81st in 19:39 and sophomore Trent Allen was 90th in 20:26.

“I went back and looked at the boys times, and they are going to see a huge improvement from the first time that we ran here,” coach Reese said. “Qualifying for state was really the goal. That is not to say that we didn’t come here to run our best, but getting to state was just icing on the cake for those boys and it completed our season.

“The boys did what they did all year long, which is they ran their races. I thought Carson had a fantastic race, and while he may have not run his best time, you don’t usually run your best on a tough course like this one. Everyone supported each other, day in and day out, and that was pretty awesome to see.”

Now both teams will begin training for what they hope could be another historic season in the fall of 2021.

“I am very excited for next season considering we’ll be returning our whole team, and I think we can be even better next year,” Johnson said. “I’m looking forward to another top 3 finish next year and can’t wait to get back on the cross country grind.”