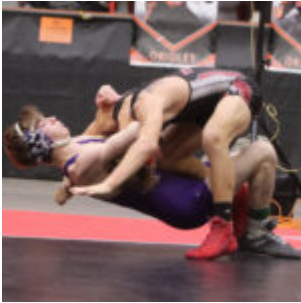


State medalists look to lead Wildcat wrestling



Senior Ryan Owens flips his opponent to his back during the 2020 state tournament last season. Owens is one of three state medalists who are wrestling for Louisburg this season.

The Louisburg wrestling team finished its 2019-20 season on a strong note as the Wildcats brought home two medals from the Class 4A state tournament.

As good as that season was, the Wildcats are in position to do even better this time around as they bring back several wrestlers – including the two state medalists back for the upcoming year. Louisburg has been using the last three weeks of practice to get ready for this Friday’s season opener.

“Practice has been pretty smooth,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “We’ve got a variety of experience levels, with more first timers than usual, which is great, but it presents a new set of challenges as well. The team is definitely excited to be back on the mats. With all the changes due to COVID-19, being back in the wrestling room has given us back a little bit of normalcy, which has been much-needed.”

The Wildcats will look to several of their seniors for leadership as they bring the most state experience.

Seniors Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen, who both earned medals at state a year ago, return to lead the Wildcats and improve off of last season. Both wrestlers are ranked in the preseason and

have chance to make even more history.

Owens, who will wrestle at 126 pounds, took fourth at 120 pounds last season at the state tournament and is currently ranked No. 3 in the state at 126.

Holtzen will also play a big role for the Wildcats. The Louisburg senior took fifth at 126 pounds a year ago at state, and will wrestle at 132 pounds this season. He is also ranked No. 3 in the state at 132 pounds.

“Every day in practice, those two are getting after it,” Bovaird said. “They’re the kind of athlete that isn’t happy with just getting to state or just placing there. They want to improve on last year and give it everything they’ve got. Both of them have talked about wrestling in college at one point, and I think they’ll catch the eyes of some collegiate coaches very quickly.

“I don’t like to pay much attention to rankings, but I will admit that it’s been nice seeing them get some respect with the 4A pre-season rankings.”



Senior Cade Holtzen, who picked up his second state medal a year ago, will wrestle at 132 pounds for the Wildcats.

It is a rare that a senior would be considered a new addition to a roster, but that is the case with Alec Younggren. The Wildcat senior, who transferred from Olathe South at the beginning of the school year, will provide them with an experienced, proven wrestler.

Younggren finished last season among the best in Class 6A as he took third at state at 220 pounds and will look to improve on that at either 220 or 285 pounds, this season. He is currently No. 2 in the preseason rankings at 285.

“It’s a rare thing to get a move-in who’s also a state medalists, and we’re very fortunate to have him,” Bovaird said. “He wrestled with both Cade and Ryan with the Olathe Southside youth program, so there’s an established friendship

there. He's a hard worker, and that's been evident from the start. Throw in his experience, competitiveness, and physicality, and he's going to have a great season."

The Wildcats were set to have another state qualifier back in junior Brandon Doles, but Doles suffered a season-ending injury during the football season and will be out. Doles was ranked No. 3 in the preseason at 170 pounds after winning a regional title a year ago.

Despite the injury, Bovaird still expects to field close to a full lineup this year. Sophomore Kaven Bartlett and junior Aiden Barker, who were one win away from qualifying for state last year, will also look to impact the Wildcats at 132 and 182 pounds, respectively.

At 106 pounds, freshman Noah Cotter will begin the season there after transferring in from Platte County (Mo.). Another freshman, Traden Noll, will take the 138-pound weight class and senior Jarrett Hoyle will wrestle at 145.

"We have some great experience returning this year," Bovaird said. "Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen were both state medalists last year. Alec Younggren has a state medal from 6A, and he's already showing a lot of promise for this season. Kaven Bartlett and Aiden Barker both came one match away from qualifying for state, and they're ready to build on that this year.

"Heading into the season, we had high hopes as a team, but then we found out that Brandon Doles wouldn't be able to return in time from his football injury and Ben Wiedenmann chose not to return this year. Those were two guys with great chances at placing at state. We should have a pretty full team. Our only gaps are at 113 and 160. As long as we're staying healthy, we should be able to continue to fill all the other weights."

Sophomore Jesse Murphy will go at 152 and senior Jacob Briley

will take Doles' spot at 170. Junior Johnathan Keegan-Childs will compete at 195 and sophomore Elijah Eslinger will wrestle at heavyweight.

Bovaird is also trying cultivate the girls' wrestling program and has three out this season. Junior Bailey Hallas (109 pounds), junior Amber Pritchett (138 or 143) and sophomore Cat Lizar (115) will look to improve throughout the year.

"We're trying to build up our girls team this year and we have three out right now," he said. "It's a start, and I'm happy with the hard work these ladies are putting in. My original plan after last year was to hit the recruiting hard during the spring and then use the summer months to have open mats to teach the basics, but COVID-19 put a halt to that. Our three girls are starting out fresh, but they're really enjoying the sport and working hard to learn the ropes.

The threat of COVID-19 has already made an impact on the Wildcats' season before it has even begun. Louisburg was forced to eliminate many of the tournaments from its schedule and will go to mainly duals throughout the season.

"The first day of practice, we got hit with six wrestlers having to be quarantined due to close contact with positive COVID-19 cases," Bovaird said. "Then we lost two more for the same reason. Most of them are back now, and despite losing that invaluable mat time, they're getting some great work in and making huge strides. Our competition schedule has changed to be almost all duals and no individual tournaments. Our competitions are smaller, and the majority are weeknights.

"We're having to wear masks when not in direct contact, doing our best to social distance when we can, and paying a lot more attention to hygiene and sanitizing. We're going to have to be flexible. The plan is to try to keep the same practice partners as much as we can, and to keep the team spread out in the practice room. If a case does pop up, hopefully, we'll

only have a small group quarantined and not the whole team.”

Louisburg will kick off its season Friday when it travels to the Fort Scott Duals. Matches are set to begin at 3 p.m.