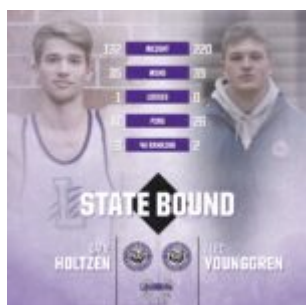


Drive for state titles fuel Holtzen, Younggren



With a combined 70-1 record, Louisburg seniors Cade Holtzen and Alec Younggren are ready to take Salina by storm.

Today is the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships that will be held at the Tony's Pizza Event Center in Salina. It is the place where wrestling dreams are made.

It is where champions are crowned, but it is also a place where tears are shed. The best of the best will square off today as the top eight wrestlers in each weight class will battle it out at noon today to try and earn a state medal.

For Holtzen and Younggren, however, just getting a state medal is not enough – not by a long shot.

Both wrestlers have their eyes squarely focused on a state championship. If either of them were to do it, they would be the school's first state champion since 2012.

"I'm expecting great things from both guys this weekend," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "They've both been coming in early this week to get in an extra workout, and they've been impeccably focused at practice after school. They've had some great support from teammates who've continued to come in to help them prepare for state.

"Both Cade and Alec have been very open to coaching this week, whether it's adjusting hip levels before shooting, keeping

shoulder pressure while on top, or hand control on bottom. They listen, and they apply what they learn. We're all excited for the tournament. It's not a matter of pressure where they're feeling like they have to go out and win. It's a matter of them being excited to compete, being thankful for the opportunity to pursue a state title. They have the mindset that they're not afraid of losing or making mistakes. That's where they need to be, and I think we have an incredible chance to bring home two state champions at the end of the day.

A lot is on the line and each wrestler has different things that have driven them this past week. It has been an emotional several days for the two Wildcat seniors and one they hope ends atop the medal stand.

Cade Holtzen

After winning the 132-pound sub-state championship, and breaking the school's all-time win record last Saturday, Cade received a text from one of his biggest fans – his grandfather, C.D. Holtzen.

“He just let me know how proud he was of me and how he couldn't wait to see me wrestle,” Cade said. “He loved watching me wrestle.”

Just two days later, that text took on a whole different meaning.

Cade learned that C.D. passed away from a bout with cancer Monday. It made a week that started out with a lot of excitement, all of sudden one filled with sadness and grief.

“This has been a really tough week for me,” Cade said. “It has been tough trying to stay focused. It has been harder than normal for sure, but I feel like I am in the right spot. I am practicing hard, wrestling hard and it is all about your drive at this point and who wants it more.”



Before the week started, Cade really wanted to win a state title, but that drive has gone into another gear after learning of his grandfather's passing.

"In my day-to-day activities it is just always in the back of my mind that he is not around anymore," Cade said. "I never really got to say goodbye to him and that is hard, but it does make the drive more important. Instead of wrestling for me and my own goals, it adds another layer of what I am wrestling for."

Cade's father, Craig, made the journey up to visit C.D. last weekend and there was one topic C.D. didn't want to let go of.

"He loved watching me wrestle," Cade said. "He was a basketball guy for sure, actually my whole family is. My dad went down to see him last weekend after we wrestled at sub-state. He was the only one allowed to visit him and he was

trying to get my grandpa to make some videos to say hi to everyone, and all he would talk about was my wrestling and how excited he was to watch me. It meant the world to me.”

C.D. will be on the forefront of Cade’s mind as he competes in Salina today as he tries to win a 132-pound state championship.

Cade will open the tournament against Pratt’s Kaiser Pelland (30-9), who he beat in the blood round at last year’s state tournament. It was a win that assured Cade of his second state medal.



Cade Holtzen talks with Louisburg head coach Bobby Bovaird following a match earlier this season.

In fact, Holtzen will only need to win one match to assure himself another state medal, but that is not his goal.

“Winning one match isn’t enough,” he said. “I know one win gets me a medal, and that would make me a 3-time state placer. That is a big accomplishment, and I am not trying to downplay that, but the ultimate goal is to win a state title and for that I need three wins. You have to take it one match at a time, but after that one win it will make me a little less nervous.”

Should he win his first match, Holtzen could draw Mulvane’s Chadwick Stahl, who is a two-time state runner-up and the No. 2 ranked wrestler in the state, in the semifinals.

Cade has found himself watching a lot of matches of Pelland, Stahl and the rest of the 132-pound field and that has led to a lot of work in practice.

“I have done quite a bit of research on who else is there,” he said. “Stahl is the No. 2 kid in the state and I have watched some of his matches this year and have tried to figure out what he likes to do. I am just working on those things in the wrestling room so I can be more successful.”



His goal of a state title hasn't changed this week, but for Cade, who he is doing it for, has.

"I am wrestling for my grandpa this week and I am dedicating this to him," Cade said. "I want it more than anyone, not just for me, but for him and my family. It would mean the world. I know he will have the best seat in the house."

Alec Younggren

Alec Younggren was won 35 straight matches through the 2021 season, is currently ranked No. 2 in the state at 220 pounds and is one of the favorites to possibly win a state title.

It hasn't always been this easy for the Louisburg senior.

Still, with all he has accomplished, Younggren still cannot get his last loss out of his head.

That loss came a year ago at the Class 6A state tournament when Younggren, a junior at the time, was wrestling for Olathe South.

He found himself in the semifinals against Wichita North's Jackson Stroud and it was a close match.

"It was back and forth," Younggren said. "He scored a takedown on me late in the third period. He was called for stalling once earlier in the match. Then we went neutral and he just ran away from me for the rest of the match. It is how he won and it just never sit right with me. He ended up winning state and that made it tougher."

Younggren would bounce back to finish third at state, but it was that one loss that has stuck with him for the next 365 days.



Now at a new school, Younggren has asserted his dominance while at Louisburg. He is stronger than he has ever been, and most of all, more driven.

“No doubt it has driven me to want to be that state champ,” he said. “After that match, I didn’t even know what else to do and where to go. I had to step up and get the next best thing and get third. I went out there and did it.

“I have been thinking about that day ever since it happened. Every single day I have gone over it in my head on what if I would have done something different, would I have won that match? It has been driving me to get better and do better things.”

Younggren isn’t the only one who wants him do well as several members of the Wildcat team that saw their season come to an end last week, have returned to the practice room to help him and Cade Holtzen stay sharp for the state tournament.



Alec Younggren leaps in the air to celebrate a teammate's victory earlier this season.

"It is amazing," Younggren said. "I appreciate them so much for coming in. Their season is done and they could be home sleeping or eating or doing whatever, but they chose to come back into the wrestling room and help us get ready for what we want to do. I just love them for it because that is hard to do after your season has just come to an end. That proves how much you love the sport."

The Louisburg senior certainly has a love for wrestling and his drive for a state title hasn't slowed any. He and Holtzen have reported to the school at 6:15 a.m. for 45 minutes of conditioning, and then they will be in the practice room for a couple hours after school.

"It has definitely been a tougher week getting up early before school to workout for 45 minutes, going to school and then

practicing for a couple hours in the evening has definitely been tough, but it is what I have to do to place at state," Younggren said. "It is what I have to do to win that match I want to win."

That match is the state championship and Younggren knows he will have a lot of competition along the way.

Up to this point in the season, Younggren has earned 26 pins and getting past the first period has been a rarity. Only five of his matches have gone past the second period, and only one has gone the distance – which was a 12-1 major decision in December.

He will face Goodland's Dexter Dautel (26-12) in the first round, and should he advance, will face the winner of Clay Center's Keegan McDonald (28-5) and Baldwin's Toby Thomas (24-5). Younggren has yet to see McDonald, but he pinned Thomas two weeks ago.



On the other side of the bracket is No. 1 ranked Cayden Winter from Andale, who is 19-0 on the year. He has held that top ranking the entire season.

“I have watched a lot of his matches and I am trying to figure different things I need to do to beat him if we were to see each other,” Younggren said. “He is a good wrestler.”

A year later, Younggren feels he is in a different place with a different mindset.

“I feel like I am 10 times stronger and 10 times more experienced than I was last year,” he said. “I learned so much last year, and coming into this year, on what I need to do and I what I need to do to win state. Leaps and bounds from where I was and know I know what it takes to win that title. I am a full 220 and last year I wasn’t filled out. I weighed like 210 then, but now I am 220 on the dot and that helps me out a lot

with strength. I have worked hard for this moment.”

Needless to say, it is state title or bust for Younggren.

“Not winning a state title would be a disappointment for me,” he said. “There is nothing else I am thinking about.”