

Four Wildcat wrestlers have season come to a close



Louisburg senior Ryan Owens finished one win shy of making it to state Saturday during the Class 4A sub-state tournament in Chanute. Owens ended his Wildcat career with a state medal and his season with a 25-8 record.

CHANUTE – As happy as Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird was to watch two of his wrestlers, Cade Holtzen and Alec Younggren qualify for state, he was just as heartbroken for the four that saw their season come to an end.

Senior Ryan Owens, junior Aiden Barker and sophomores Kaven Bartlett and Elijah Eslinger all finished outside of the top four Saturday during the Class 4A sub-state tournament at Chanute High School. It ended the season of all four wrestlers, but Bovaird couldn't have been more proud of his team.

"I consider the other four guys to be state qualifiers," he said. "Had this season been like any normal season, they would have been in the top 16 at the state tournament. Making it to "state" this year is just like being in the blood round any other year. Cade and Alec only have to win one match and they're state medalists. I'm so proud of the guys who made it to sub-state."

Owens, who medaled at state last season at 120 pounds, fell one win short of reaching the final eight this season.

The Louisburg senior lost his opening round match to Fort Scott's Shawn Barrager, but bounced back to beat Perry-Lecompton's Mason Bahnmaier by a 12-4 major decision.

Unfortunately, it would be his only win of the day as he fell in a 14-4 major decision to Independence's Kohen Wright in the blood round. He then went on to lose his fifth place to Barrager.

Owens finished his season with a 25-8 record after the sixth place finish in the sub-state tournament.

"Ryan's senior season definitely didn't end how we all wanted it to end, and this is one of the toughest parts of coaching this sport," Bovaird said. "He's given so much to the program these past four years, and he made a huge impact on his teammates. Whether it was demonstrating focus and toughness on the mat or mentoring younger guys, I'm so proud of him. My heart breaks for him, and he's been a great leader for us."



Aiden Barker puts Topeka Hayden's Will Devader on his back during his blood round match Saturday in Chanute. Barker was one win shy of making it to state.

Barker was also win victory away from punching his ticket to state at 182 pounds. He reached the semifinals by pinning Osawatomie's Seth Carrow in the first period of the quarterfinal round.

He then faced Chanute's Brayden Dillow, the eventual sub-state champion, and was pinned in the second period.

In a must-win match in the consolation semifinals, Barker had a rematch with Topeka-Hayden's Will Devader. The two squared off in the regional title match the week before, with Barker getting the win.

Devader got his revenge in a back-and-forth match as he outlasted Barker in a 14-10 decision and ended the Louisburg

junior's shot at state. Barker (27-10) did rebound to win his fifth place match with a pin of Carrow again.

"Aiden lost a real heart-breaker in his second-to-last match," Bovaird said. "It was against the same kid he'd beaten the week before in the regional finals, and just like last time, it was a back-and-forth match. He left it all out there, and I'm really proud of how he bounced back to win his final match for 5th place. Most kids would have just thrown their hands up and said 'who cares?' Aiden stepped out there, overcame the strong emotions after losing the previous match, and finished his season with a win."



Louisburg sophomore Kaven Bartlett lost a pair of 1-0 decisions Saturday at the Class 4A sub-state tournament.

As for Bartlett (126 pounds) and Eslinger (285), both finished with 0-2 records after competing in two difficult weight classes.

Bartlett (21-15) battled in both of his matches as he fell in a 1-0 decision to Independence's Cooper Anderson in the quarterfinals. Then in his first consolation match, lost by another 1-0 decision to Iola's TJ Taylor.

Eslinger (18-16) was pinned in the second round in both of his matches by Coffeyville's Brady White, the eventual champion, and Holton's Dustin Chermok.



Sophomore heavyweight Elijah Eslinger finished his sub-state 0-2, but ended the season with a winning record.

"Kaven went 0-2, but you've got to consider how tough he's been wrestling," Bovaird said. "Both losses were 1-0, and that shows how close he was. Just think how many opportunities that could have gone his way to make the score 2-1, 3-1, or 1-1 even. He's been dedicated all season, and he wrestled his heart out at Sub-State.

"Elijah has really made huge strides this year, and I'm so excited for his future. He's really figured a lot of things

out, and with gained confidence and experience on the mat, he's got two solid seasons ahead of him. He's really getting strong on his feet and on top, which require skills that will definitely pay off not only in wrestling, but also football."