

Six Wildcats move on to sub-state wrestling



Louisburg senior Cade Holtzen locks up an opponent for some back points during a 132-pound match Friday during the Class 4A regional tournament at Jefferson West.

MERIDEN – Although wrestlers still have another tournament to go to get to the state tournament in this revised version of the postseason, those moving on from last Friday's regional tournament is equivalent to qualifying for state in pre-Covid times.

So when Louisburg saw six wrestlers finish in the top four of the Class 4A regional at Jefferson West, the Wildcats were more than pleased with what they accomplished.

Seniors Cade Holtzen (132 pounds), Alec Younggren (220) and junior Aiden Barker (182) each won regional titles. Senior Ryan Owens was second (120), while sophomores Kaven Bartlett (126) and Elijah Eslinger (285) took third and fourth, respectively.

As a team, Louisburg finished strong as it took fourth with 119 points. Tonganoxie won the regional title with 225 points.

"It was great to get those six qualified for sub-state," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "To me, it shows that we have a solid core of tournament wrestlers. Those are typically our key point-scorers in duals. Moving 6 of the 7 to the next qualifier and finishing in fourth place was a great showing

for us.

“Cade, Ryan, and Alec performed excellently, and it was a great thing for Kaven and Aiden to get redemption from last year. Both lost in the blood round at regionals in very close matches, and those losses have fueled them both. Elijah making it through is also a great thing. He’s really turned the corner this year.”

Younggren continued his perfect season Friday as his three wins moved him to 32–0 on the year. The Louisburg senior has done it in impressive fashion and his regional title match was a special one.

Younggren squared off with Baldwin’s Toby Thomas, who is ranked No. 3 in the state at 220 pounds and pinned him in just 50 seconds. In fact, all three of his wins came by pin in under a minute.

It was also career win No. 100 for Younggren as the No. 2 ranked wrestler in 4A continues his quest for a state title.



Alec Younggren takes down his Ottawa opponent Friday during the Class 4A regional tournament.

Holtzen also has high state goals as he improved his record to 32-1 on the season, including a 6-2 decision over Ottawa's Liam Sutton in the regional finals. The Louisburg senior is also ranked No. 2 in the state.

"Cade is really showing his motivation for that state championship," Bovaird said. "He's aggressive and driven, and he's not letting himself be complacent with his performances. Alec is just running through his brackets right now."

Barker continued his postseason success as he was his first two matches by pin, including a third period pin over Jefferson West's Keaton Shelman in the semifinals. Barker then faced off with Topeka Hayden's Will Devader.

The Louisburg junior found himself down early, but put Devader

on his back in the second period, but couldn't get the pin due to a blood issue with Devader. Barker didn't let that stop him as he put Devader on his back again to record the 14-8 decision and capture a regional crown.



Aiden Barker works for a pin during his 182-pound championship match Friday at Jefferson West.

"Aiden has made a statement lately with his matches," Bovaird said. "He's gotten multiple wins over a returning state qualifier from Ottawa, a pin over a solid kid from Jeff West, and wins over two seniors in the last two tournaments (a state-ranked wrestler from Bishop Miege and a tough kid from Hayden)."

At 120 pounds, Owens recorded a pair of technical falls to reach the championship match, where he met Holton' Jake Barnes – who had just one loss coming into the tournament.



Ryan Owens finished as a regional runner-up at 120-pounds after a pair of technical falls.

Barnes showed why he was ranked No. 5 in the state as he prevented Owens from scoring. Owens eventually fell in a hard-fought 4-1 decision.

“Ryan is wrestling strong lately, scoring lots of points and coming close to the school record for career technical falls,” Bovaird said. “He battled to a 4-1 loss against a 3-time state placer from Holton in the regional finals.”

Bartlett had a tough road at 126 pounds as he fell to the defending state champion in the semifinals, but the Louisburg sophomore battled Holton’s Kayden Elliott to a 5-1 decision to secure a spot at sub-state and then held on for a 2-1 win over Eudora’s Mac Douglass in the third-place match.



Sophomore Kaven Bartlett pins his Atchison opponent Friday on his way to a third place regional finish.

Eslinger, the sophomore heavyweight, also showed improvement. After opening the tournament with a forfeit, he fell to No. 1 seed Hayden Robb in the semifinals, before bouncing back with a pin of Tonganoxie's Cooper Jones to secure a spot in sub-state. Eslinger was later pinned in the third place match.

"Kaven, now that he's at a more natural weight, is wrestling with focus and determination," Bovaird said. "He gives each match everything he's got. Elijah is finally figuring things out – after spending last year as a 220-pound freshman wrestling 285, he's now got confidence, strength, experience, and a new-found sense of aggression."

Each of those wrestlers are among the final 16 in their weight class and would have been a part of those traditional 16-wrestler state brackets in year's past.



Sophomore heavyweight Elijah Eslinger pulls his opponent back onto the match Friday during the regional tournament.

The Wildcats will travel to Chanute on Saturday for the sub-state tournament as they top four in each class will advance to Salina next week for the state tournament.

"Making it through sub-state this year will be like battling through to the 'blood round' of state any other year," Bovaird said. "By placing in the top-4 at sub-state, a wrestler has earned his way to the final 8 in the state. KSHSAA is medaling the top 6 wrestlers at state, which means two guys go home empty-handed. It'll be a tough road, that's for sure."

Still as tough as the road will be, the Wildcats are making the most out of every moment.

"It's a marathon from the start of the qualifying series to the top of the podium," Bovaird said. "What used to be a two-week process is now nearly a month-long deal, and there are lots of unknowns that will impact the results. One thing is

for sure – our Cats are ready to take care of business.

“Guys are asking for more mat time, they’re wanting to do morning workouts, and they’re pushing themselves at practice without me having to light any fires. At the end of the day Saturday, our guys will have given it everything they’ve got, and win or lose, they will have represented the Wildcat Wrestling program, our school, and the community very well.”

120

Ryan Owens (24-5) placed 2nd and scored 19.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Ryan Owens (Louisburg) 24-5 won by tech fall over Presley Herrig (Tonganoxie) 3-13 (TF-1.5 1:33 (16-0))
- Semifinal – Ryan Owens (Louisburg) 24-5 won by tech fall over Archer Willis (Atchison) 20-5 (TF-1.5 4:00 (16-0))
- 1st Place Match – Jake Barnes (Holton) 23-1 won by decision over Ryan Owens (Louisburg) 24-5 (Dec 4-1)

126

Kaven Bartlett (21-13) placed 3rd and scored 14.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Kaven Bartlett (Louisburg) 21-13 won by fall over John Collins (Atchison) 7-13 (Fall 1:14)
- Semifinal – Grayson Sonntag (Tonganoxie) 20-0 won by fall over Kaven Bartlett (Louisburg) 21-13 (Fall 0:33)
- Cons. Semi – Kaven Bartlett (Louisburg) 21-13 won by decision over Kayden Elliott (Holton) 11-9 (Dec 5-1)
- 3rd Place Match – Kaven Bartlett (Louisburg) 21-13 won by decision over Mac Douglas (Eudora) 8-7 (Dec 2-1)

132

Cade Holtzen (32-1) placed 1st and scored 22.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Cade Holtzen (Louisburg) 32-1 received a bye () (Bye)

- Semifinal – Cade Holtzen (Louisburg) 32-1 won by fall over Slater Skaggs (Holton) 17-8 (Fall 4:00)
- 1st Place Match – Cade Holtzen (Louisburg) 32-1 won by decision over Liam Sutton (Ottawa) 21-10 (Dec 6-2)

182

Aiden Barker (25-8) placed 1st and scored 24.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Aiden Barker (Louisburg) 25-8 won by fall over Tyler Phillips (Holton) 5-11 (Fall 1:35)
- Semifinal – Aiden Barker (Louisburg) 25-8 won by fall over Keaton Shelman (Meriden-Jefferson West) 22-7 (Fall 5:37)
- 1st Place Match – Aiden Barker (Louisburg) 25-8 won by decision over Will Devader (Topeka-Hayden) 19-5 (Dec 14-8)

195

Trace Eslinger (3-7) place is unknown and scored 0.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Konnor Tannahill (Holton) 24-1 won by fall over Trace Eslinger (Louisburg) 3-7 (Fall 0:49)
- Cons. Round 1 – Aaron Hicks (Eudora) 12-17 won by fall over Trace Eslinger (Louisburg) 3-7 (Fall 4:01)

220

Alec Younggren (32-0) placed 1st and scored 26.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Alec Younggren (Louisburg) 32-0 won by fall over Ryan Oesterreich (Meriden-Jefferson West) 12-19 (Fall 0:45)
- Semifinal – Alec Younggren (Louisburg) 32-0 won by fall over Cooper Stone (Ottawa) 2-4 (Fall 0:28)
- 1st Place Match – Alec Younggren (Louisburg) 32-0 won by fall over Toby Thomas (Baldwin) 21-4 (Fall 0:50)

Elijah Eslinger (18-14) placed 4th and scored 14.0 team points.

- Quarterfinal – Elijah Eslinger (Louisburg) 18-14 won by forfeit over Nathan Blakely (Atchison) 26-4 (For.)
- Semifinal – Hayden Robb (Perry-Lecompton) 14-0 won by fall over Elijah Eslinger (Louisburg) 18-14 (Fall 0:42)
- Cons. Semi – Elijah Eslinger (Louisburg) 18-14 won by fall over Cooper Jones (Tonganoxie) 8-16 (Fall 2:21)
- 3rd Place Match – Aaron Clevenger (Ottawa) 22-10 won by fall over Elijah Eslinger (Louisburg) 18-14 (Fall 1:31)