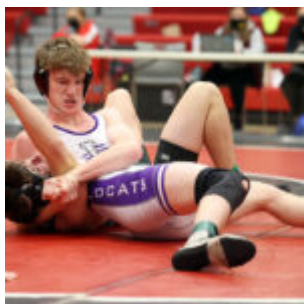


# Wildcat wrestlers end regular season with winning week



***Louisburg sophomore Jesse Murphy gets a pin during his 152-pound match Saturday against Rock Creek at Ottawa High School.***

For the Louisburg wrestling team, duals this season have been a means to an end.

With more duals on the Wildcats' schedule to the COVID-19 restrictions, they don't have as many individual matches and those duals haven't gone Louisburg's way as much as it would have liked.

The dual season came to a close for the Wildcats last Friday and Saturday, but it certainly ended on a positive note them.

Louisburg swept a pair of league duals over Eudora and Piper on Friday at Eudora High School, and then on Saturday, got another win over Rock Creek at Ottawa. In all, Louisburg went 3-2 following losses to Ottawa and Concordia on Saturday.

Louisburg ended its Frontier League dual season with a 3-5 record and were 10-14 overall.

"The fact that we're putting a lot of inexperienced kids on the varsity mat has to have been disheartening for a lot of the guys on the team, but at the same time, we're giving up fewer forfeits than in previous years," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "I think the squad is building toward a solid conclusion for the season. They're doing great mentally, and

our practices have been going really well.”

Louisburg opened up against Eudora to begin Friday’s action and the Wildcats took the early lead on a pin from senior Ryan Owens at 120 pounds, a technical fall from sophomore Kaven Bartlett at 126 and a major decision from Cade Holtzen at 132.

Eudora’s middleweights, which is the strength of their team, began to take over and the Cardinals took a 38-27 lead following the 195-pound match.

Louisburg’s heavyweights came through in a big way as senior Alec Younggren (220) and sophomore Elijah Eslinger (285) both earned pins to give Louisburg the 39-38 victory.



***Louisburg senior Jacob Briley gets a pin during his 170-pound match Saturday in Ottawa.***

“On paper, I suppose we shouldn’t have beaten Eudora,” Bovaird

said. "There were some matches that we lost, but we only lost by a major decision – like at 145 and 152. Those are two of Eudora's stronger weights, and (Jarrett) Hoyle and (Jesse) Murphy really showed a lot of guts and toughness by fighting off their attacks.

"It comes down to the fact that the whole team earned that victory by considering "bonus points." A loss by decision only gives the other team 3 points, but a loss by pin gives them 6. Eudora is an experienced team, and to be able to come away from there with a win is a pretty good experience."

The Wildcats used that momentum to cruise to a 54-22 win over Piper in their next dual.

The next day, Louisburg traveled to Ottawa for a matchup with the Cyclones, Rock Creek and Concordia.

After falling to Ottawa 46-36, and to Concordia 57-21, the Wildcats ended their day with a 52-24 victory over Rock Creek.

"I love getting the chance to see new teams, especially before state," Bovaird said. "Typically, we only get to see Concordia and Rock Creek at state, but this season, we got a glimpse of what 4A looks like in Central Kansas. There's the factor of seeing some "fresh" competition, but it's also a great measuring stick for what we might see as we get closer to the state championships.

"Both of those teams are tough, and we battled pretty well. A few matches against Concordia didn't go the way I'd planned, but that's an experienced team with a lot of kids who've been wrestling since they were little."

Holtzen and Younggren each won their three matches, as did Bartlett – who is settled into his new weight at 126. Combined, Bartlett went 5-0 over those two outings.



***Louisburg sophomore Kaven Bartlett went 5-0 last weekend at 126 pounds.***

“Last year, Kaven nearly had 30 wins, and this year he’s had some challenges pop up in front of him,” Bovaird said. “First, he had to bump up a couple weights after his initial November weigh-in at 119. He spent much of the first part of the season wrestling at 132, winning some great matches, but also finding himself up against some heavier opponents. Now that he’s down to 126, he’s comfortable and at more of a natural weight.

“He’s weathered the storm of the season and kept a great focus on improving his wrestling skills. That’s definitely given him some more confidence, and I’m pretty proud of how he’s kept his focus through the lumps of giving up so much weight and suffering a broken nose in mid-January against Paola.”

Also on Saturday, Owens went 2-1 at 120 pounds and senior Jacob Briley (170) and Eslinger did the same. Freshman Noah

Cotter (106), senior Jarrett Hoyle (145), sophomore Jesse Murphy (152) and junior Aiden Barker (182) each had a win.

Now the Wildcats will begin their focus on the postseason and that begins at noon Saturday when they travel to Santa Fe Trail High School for the Class 4A district tournament. The top four wrestlers from each weight class will move on to regionals Feb. 12 at Jefferson West High School.

Included with the Wildcats at districts is Baldwin, Eudora, Bishop Ward, Ottawa, Santa Fe Trail and Bishop Miege.

"I'm seeing more and more consistency from our guys," Bovaird said. "They're starting to apply more of what we're doing at practice, and I think it's paying off. The changes in our schedule, which have taken away most of our Saturday competitions, may very well have been a good thing. The team is looking strong and I'm seeing very little sign of fatigue or burn-out."