

STATE CHAMPS: Louisburg boys track wins school's fifth state title



Members of the Louisburg state championship team are (front row, from left) Jaden Vohs, Luke Faulkner, Ben Wiedenmann, Tom Koontz, Justin Collins, Jay Scollin, Ethan Ptacek; (middle row) Mason Dobbins, Isaiah Whitley, Ryan Rogers, Hayden Ross, Cade Holtzen, Nathan Vincent, Caden Caplinger, Carson Houchen, Nathan Apple, coach Leanna Willer; (back row) coaches Pete Skakal, Alex Gentges, Andy Wright and John Reece.

WICHITA – On the 10th anniversary of the Louisburg boys' first state track championship, this year's team wanted to do something to commemorate the historic event.

The Wildcats decided they wanted to win one of their own.

Louisburg edged out Andale for the state championship Friday during the Class 4A Kansas Track and Field Championships at Cessna Stadium in Wichita.

It is just the second track championship for Louisburg and just the fourth team state championship in school history.

The first one was a golf title in 1977, and then football won its first state title in 2010. The track team followed with its first later that school year in 2011 and the Louisburg cheer squad won a state title in 2019.

“There are no words to describe how incredibly proud I was of the entire team,” Louisburg coach Andy Wright said. “It was a total team effort. It was a moment I will never forget as a coach, and how exciting that it came down to the final race. Everyone gave it their all, and I just couldn’t happier as a coach to see all of that hard work pay off for them with the greatest reward.”



Louisburg senior Ben Wiedenmann shows off the Class 4A state championship trophy to the crowd Friday in Wichita.

Like with every good championship, there was plenty of drama toward the end as the state title came down to the last race – the 4×400-meter relay.

Louisburg held a 71.5-71 lead over Andale going into the 4×400. The Wildcats needed to beat Andale to secure their state title.

Justin Collins, Tom Koontz, Ethan Ptacek and Ben Wiedenmann had the Wildcats' title hope riding on their fast feet.

Everyone on the Louisburg and Andale side knew what was at stake.

"I was one of the only people from Louisburg on the field during the 4×4, and going into it I knew that beating Andale would get us a state championship," senior Carson Houchen said. "I stood at the 200m mark to make sure our runners had the kick they needed on the second half of the race, and I was pretty much surrounded by Andale guys. I could hear them taking about how they just needed to beat Louisburg to win the meet."



Justin Collins takes off from his blocks to start the 4×400-meter relay.

Collins opened the race for Louisburg, and while he was toward

the front of the pack – so was Andale.

“I was very nervous and super excited for it to start because I knew that race would determine a lot,” Collins said.”

Still out in front of Andale, Collins handed the baton to Koontz, who widened the lead even more.

“The 4x4 was definitely the most stressful part of the day, because I knew we had a real chance to win state,” Koontz said. “So all the stress I had before relating to my events and myself melted away, because it became solely about the team and our school.

“So I knew that they were counting on us, and I wasn’t planning on letting them down. Nonetheless, I was still scared, but I had faith in our group.”



Tom Koontz runs by his teammates as they cheer him on during the second leg of the 4x400 relay.

Koontz had a reason to be confident as he handed the baton off to Ptacek who widened that lead over Andale a little more and was still toward the front of the pack.

Then came the final handoff to Wiedenmann, who by that time, had plenty of breathing room between him and the Andale runner as he ran the final 400 meters for the state title.



Sophomore Ethan Ptacek takes off during the third leg of the 4×400.

“Talking to our teammates and coaches before the race, it became very apparent that we had to just beat Andale in the 4×4 to secure the state championship,” Wiedenmann said. “While it did make us pretty nervous, we all set a goal to do our best and beat Eudora, our season long rivals, and just let the rest fall in place.

“Being the last leg I knew that if the race was close or if I

lost the lead on Andale that the blame really comes down to me, but I just trusted my teammates and did the best I could to supplement their efforts.”



Ben Wiedenmann takes the handoff from Ethan Ptacek as he enters the final leg of the 4×400.

The Wildcat quartet did just that as they set a new personal record of 3:29.13 and edged out Eudora for third place. Andale finished in seventh at 3:33.

“We went out there and ran our race and ended up getting a new personal record, and ended up grabbing a state title with it,” Collins said.

Once the race was over, members of the Wildcat team emptied from the Cessna Stadium stands and made their way to the infield to congratulate each other – and why not – it was an historic day.

“That was probably one of the happiest moments I have ever

had,” Houchen said. “It was a race, and an experience, I will never forget.”



Senior Cade Holtzen was all smiles, as were the rest of his teammates, after the Wildcats secured the state title.

The state championship was more than one race for Louisburg as points came from all over the place to keep the Wildcats in the race.

Louisburg had just one state champion on the day in Koontz in the 110-meter hurdles. The rest, the Wildcats just racked up points multiple events.

The Wildcats scored points in 12 of the 18 events, several of which had multiple point-getters. Each of the three relays had top three finishes, while senior Luke Faulkner was second in the pole vault.



Louisburg head coach Andy Wright gives a big hug to Tom Koontz following the 4×400-meter relay.

Louisburg ended up with 77.5 points and Andale was second with 73. Buhler was third in the state with 53.

“Winning the team state championship was amazing because we were ranked second or third and we thought we still had to fight for those places,” Faulkner said. “Over time during the meet, we kept crawling up to first in points and started to surprise ourselves at what we could accomplish.”