

Grapple on the Gridiron event a success for Louisburg wrestling



The first-ever Grapple on the Gridiron event was held at Wildcat Stadium last Friday as way to end the week of wrestling camp.

Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird wanted to find a memorable way to end his week of camp and he may have found the perfect solution.

Wrestling on the football field.

As weird as it sounds, the “Grapple on the Gridiron” event held at Wildcat Stadium last Friday, was a success.

The event featured more than 20 matches, had volunteer coaches and Bovaird himself officiated all of the matches in the humid Kansas weather.

“The last few years, I’ve been seeing more and more wrestling programs try to pull off an outdoor wrestling event,” Bovaird said. “Sometimes it works out, but it seems like there’s a big risk based on the weather. During the wrestling season, it’s usually way too cold or there’s snow on the ground, and if you do it during the summertime, the heat from the sun really becomes a factor. I’ve heard of kids getting burned from the mats because they’re so hot.”

“With the July 4th holiday falling on a Sunday and Monday being the federally observed holiday, I had to make my 4-day camp run Tuesday through Friday. I got to thinking, how on earth could I get kids to come back for the last day? I mean, who wants to spend time at wrestling camp from 6:30-8:30pm on a Friday in the middle of summer? Then I got a whim to try to end camp with a special event that kids would not want to miss – a dual on the football field.”



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker (left) and Brandon Doles dual each other last Friday during the Grapple on the Gridiron.

The Grapple on the Gridiron had a good turnout from parents to community members and featured matches from wrestlers from the kids club to the high school level.

Wildcat Wrestling Club coaches Shawn Crossley and Trevor Finch were the coaches for the two teams, while former Louisburg

wrestler Sonny Ewalt and his grandson, Joey, were also honorary coaches.

Joey also served as the camp clinician for the week. He was a state placer at Prairie View High School, and was a NJCAA national qualifier for Barton Community College. He is also an NAIA national qualifier for Baker University.

Another WWC coach, Jon Clayton, and parent Justin Weiss provided commentary for each of the matches as well.

"I think it went off with a huge bang," Bovaird said. "The kids loved it, and so did the families and fans. I'm very thankful for all the help I got from the community and the program. Doug Key and Michael Pickman were very helpful with getting it arranged and letting us use the facility and the stadium lights. Jon and Justin did an awesome job announcing. They gave more than just an announcement of who was wrestling; they used their knowledge of the sport to make it really entertaining for the crowd.

"Former LHS wrestling team manager and 'superfan' Jamie Watrous worked with LHS alum Mike Ewalt served as score keepers. We had tons of help getting the mats moved, set up, torn down, and returned to LHS. Parents, wrestlers, and alumni chipped in with that major task."



Louisburg fourth-graders Brilyn Stamm (left) and Emma Robertson compete last Friday at Wildcat Stadium. Stamm finished fourth at USAWKS state earlier this year and Robertson was fifth.

For the week of camp, Bovaird said he had 48 athletes in his advanced camp and more than 20 for the beginner session. He also had several high school graduates that came back to help with the camp as well.

“I was a little worried about how the camp would go this summer,” he said. “Traditionally, I try to have camp the week leading up to the Sunflower State Games wrestling tournament in Topeka, and this year it was immediately after the July 4th holiday. I feared there would be a lot of families traveling around that time, but I think our numbers this year were some of the highest we’ve ever had. Our biggest turnout was 48 kids Tuesday and Wednesday evening for the advanced session, and it was awesome to see the wrestling room so crowded. We

had lots of kids from elementary through middle school and high school.

“Joey Ewalt was our featured clinician, and he did an excellent job. His dad Mike was a 2x state placer for LHS in the late 80s, and he’s a third-generation wrestling coach. Our beginners camp was tons of fun as well. The kids were enthusiastic, attentive, and very enjoyable to work with.”



WWC coach Shawn Crossley gives some words of advice to Eli DeCavele before his match.

As for whether the Grapple on the Gridiron will be an annual event is still yet to be decided, but Bovaird is hoping it can make a return.

“Despite all the hard work that went into setting it up, I’d love to try to do it again in the future, making it an annual event,” Bovaird said. “There’s always the question of weather,

but that's something we can deal with. Some fans suggested trying to make it a fundraiser, but I really like the fact that we were able to offer something free on a Friday evening for folks to come and watch.

"One of the crucial elements of building a program is making the program well-known in the community – to make it something that kids want to be a part of. Getting the chance to wrestle on the football field under the lights is something that is exciting for everyone."