

Numbers up for Louisburg wrestling as Wildcats prepare for opener



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker is one of four returning state qualifiers from a season ago for the Wildcats. Louisburg opens its season at 3 p.m. on Friday at the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.

When Bobby Bovaird saw how many athletes there were in his wrestling room on the first day of practice, he was a little taken aback.

As the Louisburg wrestling team approaches its first competition, the Wildcats have 46 out this season, which is the most under Bovaird.

It was a welcome sight to a coach that lost two state placers and another state qualifier off his team from a year ago.

“Those might be our highest numbers since I’ve been here,” Bovaird said. “Since the 2018-19 season, which had unusually low numbers, we’ve been growing back up with each year. I thought we’d have somewhere in the 30s, but in October when I sat down and projected how many we could potentially get, I was caught off guard when I had numbers in the upper 40s. We had a few guys I’d expected not come out, and we’ve been blessed with a bunch of unexpected new additions.”

The Wildcats have a mixture of veteran leadership and

underclassmen, but it all starts with their returning state qualifiers.

Senior Aiden Barker (195 pounds), senior Brandon Doles (182) and junior Kaven Bartlett (126) are the team captains this season and have all had experience in the postseason.

Barker and Doles have each won a regional title in the past, while Bartlett and junior heavyweight Elijah Eslinger (285) also placed at the regional tournament a year ago.



Louisburg junior Kaven Bartlett will compete at 126 pounds again this year and is one of four returning state qualifiers for the Wildcats.

Doles missed all of last season with an injury, but Bovaird is happy with what he is seeing from each of the four athletes.

“Brandon and Aiden have both been regional champions, and with Kaven and Elijah placing at regionals last year, that will help get them higher seeds at tournaments,” Bovaird said. “All

four of them are looking pretty solid so far, and I'm excited to see them test themselves against competition these next few weeks."

Louisburg also has a few returning wrestlers from its varsity squad last year. Sophomore Noah Cotter (106) will lead things off and sophomore Traden Noll will compete at 138 pounds.

Junior Jesse Murphy will also return at 152 pounds and will compete against senior Aidan Cannon for the spot.

The Wildcats were also blessed with an handful of experienced freshmen as many of them have spent time wrestling at kids state.

One of those is Colton Blue and he will wrestle at 113 pounds this season, while fellow freshman Greysen Dixon is at 120.

Sophomore J'Lee Collins will compete at 132, while freshmen Jay and Reid McCaskill will wrestle at 145. Sophomore Gage Gilliland will also battle for a 138-pound spot.

Freshman Lucas Swartz is the Wildcats' 160-pounder. Freshmen Ashton Moore and Brayden Yoder will compete at 170.

Juniors Cameron McClellan and Kyle Oram could each see time at 220 pounds.

"We've been battling things out in the practice room, and the thing about wrestling is that the lineup can change every week," Bovaird said. "This weekend at our opener at Fort Scott, we're taking multiple guys at some weights, just to see what our options are.

"Practices have been great this year," Bovaird said. "The team is focused and ready to learn and get better every day. We've got a new assistant coach, Shane Miller, who comes to us from Norton Community High School. His experience and leadership has been great this season so far."

Senior Bailey Hallas is the team's lone girls wrestler this season and will compete at 109 pounds. Bovaird is looking forward to seeing what she can accomplish.

"Bailey has a year under her belt, and with that comes a lot more confidence," he said. "I'm hoping that she'll be able to get on the medal stand at regionals in February to become our first girls state qualifier."

Louisburg opens its season this Friday when it travels to the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.

It is the first part of the journey where many of the wrestlers hope to finish at the state tournament at the end of the year.

"With the team's experience, whether it's youth wrestling or high school wrestling, the major thing we need to do is to have the best mindset with every match," Bovaird said. "This year's motto is "True GRIT," which stands for Gratitude, Resilience, Improvement, and Trust. We've been using the Wrestling Mindset program for the past four years, and I find that it's been a game changer for a lot of the athletes in the program.

"We want to win matches and medals. We want our wrestlers to perform at their best. We'd like to be back at the top of the Frontier League, win a regional team plaque, and take a ton of kids to state. But we also want to make sure that our wrestlers leave the program and are better prepared to be good people and contributing members of society."