

Wildcats open season with runner-up finish at Fort Scott



FORT SCOTT – The first dual of the season didn't go the way the Louisburg wrestling team had hoped it would Friday at the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.

However, it was the way the Wildcats responded that made the day all the more worth it.

After a setback to Blue Valley Southwest to start the day, Louisburg reeled off four straight victories to earn second place at the tournament and the Wildcats created some momentum moving forward.

"All in all, it was a pretty solid start to the season, and I'm proud of how the guys competed," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "If you look at our line-up compared to our opponents, we had a very young and inexperienced team. We had six freshmen and three sophomores, and four of the fourteen wrestlers are first- or second-year wrestlers. But we fielded a full team, top to bottom, for the first time in a long time, and because we had that depth and consistency, we were able to edge out a couple of teams in close duals."

Louisburg opened the tournament against the No. 5 team in Class 5A, Blue Valley Southwest, and came away with a 54-27 setback.

The Wildcats then went up against Fort Scott, and found themselves down three points going into the last match, but junior Elijah Eslinger came through with a pin in the heavyweight match to give Louisburg a 42-39 victory.

That momentum carried over into the rest of the day as the Wildcats defeated Atchison County, 42-37 and Anderson County, 60-24. Louisburg ended its day with a 78-6 victory over team mixed with junior varsity wrestlers.

Senior Aiden Barker had a strong first outing as he ended the day with a 5-0 record and three pins. The No. 4 wrestler in Class 4A opened the tournament with a victory over a state qualifier.

“Barker definitely had a great day,” Bovaird said. “His first match was the biggest test – he wrestled a strong kid from Blue Valley Southwest who was a state qualifier two years ago in 5A and a part of a phenomenal and well-coached BVSU program. Barker showed a great deal of maturity, composure, and leadership in his matches throughout the day.”

Eslinger also had a big day for Louisburg. Along with his match sealing win over Fort Scott, he finished with a 5-0 record and three pins as well.

“One of the most exciting things about this sport is seeing the growth from year-to-year,” Bovaird said. “Elijah started off as a freshman wrestling varsity at 285 because we had no one else. In the past two years, he’s gotten tons more confidence and experience. Last year, he started being our true anchor – in a close dual, we knew he could seal the victory at the last weight. All of the matches in a dual are important, but it’s pretty exciting when a dual comes down to the final match. He’s done a great job showing composure and reliability in his position on the team, especially in the Fort Scott dual.”

Junior captain Kaven Bartlett had a successful day with a 4-1

record and two pins at 126 pounds. Freshman Ashton Moore was 4-1 with four pins at 170 pounds, while sophomore Noah Cotter (106) and freshman Colton Blue (113) were also 4-1.

Freshman Greysen Dixon (120), junior Jesse Murphy (152), freshman Lucas Swartz (160) and freshman Brayden Yoder (182) also had winning records on the day.

“Noah Cotter and Colton Blue had a lot of opens in their weights, but they’re going to have great seasons,” Bovaird said. “Both are hammers on the mat and have great work ethics. Kaven was very strong in his matches, and his lone loss on the day (5-3 overtime loss) was not without controversy. He controlled that match and wrestled his tail off from the first to the last whistle, and that goes for all of his matches. Ashton also had a great day, losing only to the No. 1 ranked wrestler in Kansas 5A.”

Louisburg will try and keep its winning ways going Friday when the Wildcats travel to Baldwin for another dual tournament. Matches begin at 4:30 p.m.