

Wildcats take third at Tonganoxie, eight finish in the top four



Louisburg freshman Jay McCaskill works for a pin during his 145 pound match Saturday at Tonganoxie.

TONGANOXIE – Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird couldn't have asked for a much better way for his team to end the 2021 part of its schedule.

During the Randy Starcher Invitational on Saturday in Tonganoxie, Louisburg finished third out of 10 teams with 153 points. Tonganoxie was first with 210 and Lansing was second at 167.5

The Wildcats were also well-represented in the medal department as they had eight wrestlers finish in the top four.

"We had a pretty solid conclusion to the first part of the season," Bovaird said. "At Friday's practice, it was weird – we had the whole gym to ourselves. Basketball had practiced earlier in the day, so we were the only ones there. I went a little off-script from my original match prep practice place. We did some visualizing and breathing exercises.

"At Saturday's tournament, Tonganoxie had a classroom set aside for each school to store their bags and to have a place to decompress or get away from the craziness of the tournament. It was perfect timing to get the team to try some

visualizing on their own. I think it definitely paid off. All of our guys were pretty focused and competitive.”

Louisburg senior Aiden Barker had one of the more dominant performances of the tournament. Barker finished first at 195 pounds with a 5-0 record and won all of them by pin.

All of those pins were in the first period, except for the championship match against Lansing’s Andrew Shields, in which Barker got the pin 20 seconds in the second period.

“Aiden has that senior confidence that I love to see,” Bovaird said. “He’s been driven by the past two seasons – coming so short of going to state as a sophomore and coming one match away from going to the final 8 last year. You could tell during football that he was on a mission to accomplish his goals in the fall, and you can tell the same thing now. He was dominant in all five matches.”



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker records one of his five pins Saturday at Tonganoxie. Barker won the title at 195 pounds.

Juniors Kaven Bartlett (126 pounds) and freshman Colton Blue (113) also found themselves in the championship match.

Bartlett won his first three matches, including two by pin and an 8-4 decision over Independence's Cooper Anderson. Bartlett, who is ranked No. 5 in Class 4A, went up against No. 1 ranked Braeden Moore from Tonganoxie and lost by pin to take second.

Blue won his first four matches of the day and went up against Independence's Mason Gibbons in the championship. The Louisburg freshman fell in a 10-4 decision.

Of the top eight finishers, five of them were either freshmen or sophomores.

"This freshman class is pretty special," 'Bovaird said. "I've

been watching them grow from youth wrestling through middle school wrestling. Now that they're on the mats for high school, they're delivering on their potential and then some. It will be an amazing next four years to see their growth and accomplishments."

One of those freshmen was Jay McCaskill, who went on to take third at 145 pounds. After McCaskill lost his first match of the day, he rattled off four straight wins, including a pin in the third place match.

Sophomore Noah Cotter went 3-2 at 106 pounds, and all three came by pin to take third place.

Freshman Brayden Yoder had a big day at 182 pounds as he went 3-1, including a pin in his third place match.



Louisburg junior Elijah Eslinger took third at 285 pounds

Saturday at Tonganoxie.

Junior Elijah Eslinger also finished third at 285 pounds with a 3-1 record. Eslinger outlasted Tongnaoxie's Cooper Jones in a 4-3 decision in the third place match.

At 170 pounds, freshman Ashton Moore won his first three matches and took fourth overall.

"All of our guys are really coming together and making huge strides," Bovaird said. "Noah was 3-2 and finished in 3rd place. He got a revenge win from last year against his Tonganoxie opponent, and his two losses were tech falls. He just won't give up, and now that he's not giving up 15 pounds each match, he's going to see some great things this year. Colton only lost one match – a rematch against Independence. The week before, he lost by major, but this time it was much closer. Kaven got a revenge win against Independence, handing him his first loss of the season.

"Jay lost to the eventual champion in the first round, but he rattled off four pins to finish 3rd. Lucas Swartz made the drop to 152 for the weekend to fill in for Jesse Murphy. He was 1-3, but he was battling in each of his matches. Ashton and Brayden were a combined 6-3 on the weekend, with six pins."

Louisburg will look to use that momentum on Jan. 8 when the Wildcats host the Louisburg Invitational in their first action after the holiday break.