

# Wildcat wrestlers finish runner-up at home tournament



*Louisburg freshman Brayden Yoder looks to put his opponent on his back during a 182-pound match Saturday at the Louisburg Wildcat Invitational. Yoder finished second overall and was one of five Wildcats to make it to the championship match.*

In its first action back from the holiday break, the Louisburg wrestling team had a chance to ease back into the swing of things in front of its home fans.

The Wildcats competed in the Louisburg Wildcat Invitational on Saturday and put together a strong performance in the 10-team field.

Louisburg finished second overall with 200.5 points and finished 19 points behind champion Pittsburg. Blue Valley West was third at 188.

“After the first round and part of the second round, I wasn’t sure how we were going to end up as a team,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Hosting a tournament and having a full line-up makes for a busy day, so I didn’t really think much about it. After lunch, kids kept saying we were bouncing in and out of first place and keeping neck-and-neck with Pittsburg.

“They’re a team that is made up mostly of juniors and seniors, and our team had 7 freshmen and 2 sophomores in the line-up. Several of our varsity guys are only second year wrestlers. By

the end of the day, I was pretty excited to see the team battling for a plaque at our home tournament.”

Louisburg had a successful day as eight wrestlers left with medals and five of them found themselves in the championship match.



***Louisburg senior Aiden Barker works for a pin at 195 pounds Saturday during the Wildcats’ home tournament. Barker was first in his weight class.***

Senior Aiden Barker dominated his way to a title at 195-pounds as he recorded four pins and never had to go more than one round. He pinned Pittsburg’s Jaquan Augustin in 1:38 in the championship.

“Aiden’s really stepping up,” Bovaird said. “He knows that he’s seen his last couple of seasons fall short of his goals, and I remember how hard it hit him each time. He’s a focused

young man who's taking things seriously this season. He's giving great leadership to his teammates and setting a high bar."

Four other Wildcats – Colton Blue (113 pounds), Kaven Bartlett (126), Brayden Yoder (182) and Elijah Eslinger (285) – also earned a spot in the championship match.

Although none of them were able to come out on top in their final match, each of them wrestled strong all day according to Bovaird.

Blue (13-4), a freshman, went 3-0 with three pins to advance to the title match, but was pinned in the second period of the championship by Blue Valley West's Logan Meinheit despite getting out to a 4-0 lead.

As for Bartlett, the Louisburg junior won four straight matches on his way to a spot in the championship with three pins and a technical fall. He lost a close 4-3 decision to Anderson County's AJ Schaffer in the first place match.



***Louisburg junior Kaven Bartlett finished second overall at 126 pounds Saturday.***

“Colton had a great tournament, which included a win over a Shawnee Mission East wrestler who had been ranked at one point this season,” Bovaird said. “In the finals, he got a quick takedown and back points against his opponent, who’s a pretty talented wrestler himself.

“Kaven was on a mission Saturday. Even though he didn’t win in the finals, he was fighting every second of the match. I thought he was doing what he needed to do to score points and keep his opponent on his heels. I’d hoped he would have gotten that second stalling call, which would have tied the match, but it just didn’t go his way.”

Yoder, a freshman, also had a strong home debut with a 3-1 record through pool and bracket play and led up to a matchup with Blue Valley West’s Matt Lancaster, who is undefeated on the season. Lancaster handed Yoder (11-7) his only two losses on the day.

As for Eslinger, he rolled up four straight wins to advance to the heavyweight championship, including a pair of pins. Eslinger (14-4) lost by pin in the championship to Liberal's Hudson Rice.

"Brayden weighed in at just over 170 and he was competing against a bunch of kids who were not only upperclassmen, but also weighing as much as 12 pounds more than Brayden," Bovaird said. "He had a great match in the semifinals, giving a Liberal kid his second loss of the season, and then he faced a brute senior from BV West in the finals.

"Elijah had two great wins by decision Saturday, with one of them being a revenge win over a Royal Valley wrestler from last year. I love how he's been showing that he's got the endurance and mental toughness to wrestle three full periods. That will be a huge asset down the road."

Sophomore Noah Cotter (106 pounds) and freshman Ashton Moore (170) each finished third overall, while junior Jesse Murphy (152) was fourth.

Cotter (13-6) finished the day with a 4-1 record, including a first period pin over Royal Valley's Payton Rivera in the third place match.





***Sophomore J'Lee Collins works for a pin at 132 pounds on Saturday in Louisburg.***

As for Moore (13-6), he was 3-2 with a close 3-2 decision over Leavenworth's Emory Fedd in the third place match. Murphy (8-6) was 2-3 on the day after getting pinned by Blue Valley West's Veda Gummadipudi in third place match.

"Noah Cotter is wrestling like he's on a mission," Bovaird said. "He was 4-1 with 4 pins Saturday, and his only loss was an overtime decision that really could have gone either way. Jesse had a great come-from-behind win in the second round of the tournament, and that win helped him get to fourth. Ashton finished in third place, but he was perhaps the most aggressive I've seen him so far this season."

Freshman Jay McCaskill (145), sophomore J'Lee Collins (132) and freshman Lucas Swartz (160) each finished fifth overall.

Louisburg is back in action tonight at Olathe South and will face off with Labette County in dual action. The Wildcats will then travel to the Topeka Invitational on Saturday.