

Wildcat wrestlers eye medal stand at state tournament



SALINA – The five members of the Louisburg wrestling team will be more than hungry to try and get to the medal stand this weekend at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina.

Kaven Bartlett (126 pounds), Ashton Moore (170), Brandon Doles (182), Aiden Barker (195) and Elijah Eslinger (285) will represent Louisburg and they have all set goals for themselves.

The biggest of which is that coveted state medal, something that none of the five have been able to garner during their high school career. Although Moore is a freshman, the other four have been eying a trip to the medal stand for the last couple of years.

Now, they are as close as ever to achieving that milestone.

“In all honesty, each of our wrestlers has a legitimate chance of bringing home a state medal this year,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “I’ve gone through the brackets, and even before I shared the brackets with the guys, I can tell that they’re shooting for their next goal. Making it to state was one goal; they’ve turned the page and are focusing on the next one.

“They’re not just happy with making it to Salina; they all want to bring home some hardware. Aiden and Brandon have been especially driven this year. They’ve been leaders on and off

the mat, in the classroom and in other sports, and I'm excited to see what they're capable of doing this weekend."

Barker is the lone Wildcat that is ranked by the Kansas Wrestling Coaches Association and is the No. 4 wrestler at 195 pounds and one of the favorites to finish in the top six and get a medal.

Barker (27-6) opens against Independence's Isaiah Melugin (15-14). Should Barker advance, he will very well could see the state's No. 1 wrestler, Hayden Oviatt from Wamego, in the next round.

As for Doles, who missed the state tournament last season with an injury, this is his third state appearance.

Doles (7-3) opens against Burlington's Brock Zimmerman (27-10), who he has lost two twice this season when Doles was just coming back from an injury.

Bartlett (26-8), who will wrestle for the first time out in Salina, is coming off a big regional performance where he finished second. He will square off with Holcomb's Greg Martinez (23-11) in his first match.

Moore (25-11) will enter the state tournament as a young 170-pounder and is the only freshman in the bracket after taking second at regionals. He will face off with El Dorado's Terek White (20-10) to begin tournament action.

Eslinger (26-8) will also be making his first trip to Salina after the Wildcat heavyweight took third at regionals. He will wrestle Augusta's Willy Jon Morales (33-8), who is ranked No. 5 in the state.

The Wildcats have spent the last three days of practice preparing for all the obstacles the state tournament as in store for them.

"Practices have been pretty solid this week," Bovaird said.

“We’ve have our state qualifiers plus several practice partners who volunteered to come in to help them get ready for state. The atmosphere has been focused and positive.

“The guys have come in ready to work, gotten that work finished, and put in a lot of smart work over the last three days. The goal is to maintain our upward trajectory so that we get our highest peak at the state tournament.”

To view all the state tournament brackets, [click here](#).

Matches will begin at 10 a.m. on Friday at the Tony’s Pizza Events Center in Salina, and the tournament will run through Saturday.