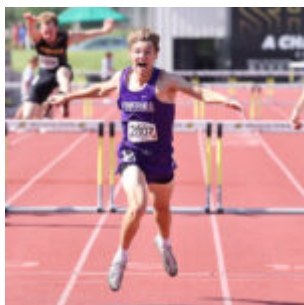


STATE CHAMPS! Koontz sweeps hurdles at state, Caplinger takes gold in pole vault



Tom Koontz was all smiles after he finished first in the 300-meter hurdles Saturday at the Class 4A state meet at Wichita State University. Koontz also won a state title in the 110 hurdles.

WICHITA – The look on Tom Koontz’s face said it all.

Shock. Excitement. Relief. And everything in between.

When Koontz crossed the finish line following the finals of the 300-meter hurdles Saturday at the Class 4A state meet in Wichita, he was speechless.

After the shock quickly wore off, Koontz fell to his knees on the track. He was spent. The Louisburg senior couldn’t even remember part of the race he ran just seconds earlier.

“I crossed the finish line and just snapped back into reality – I just couldn’t believe it,” Koontz said.

What he couldn’t believe was he had just won his first state title in the 300 hurdles and Koontz did so by breaking a 14-year-old school record. Koontz ran a time of 38.98 seconds to break R.J. Saunders’ record of 39.16 set in 2008 to earn the gold.

It turned out to be his second state title of the day as he

also earned the gold medal in the 110-meter high hurdles with a time of 14.61 seconds. Koontz won the state in that event last season as well.



Tom Koontz clears one final hurdle before winning gold in the 300 meters Saturday at the state meet.

However, those weren't the only state titles captured by Louisburg over the weekend. Sophomore Caden Caplinger took first in the pole vault after he cleared 14 feet, 6 inches, a new personal best, and helped the Wildcats to a third place team finish.

As for Koontz, his title in the 300 hurdles meant a lot to him. He finished second a year ago to Topeka-Hayden's Jake Muller, and did the same this year at the regional meet.

"I woke up knowing it wasn't going to be easy," Koontz said of his Saturday events. "I have been thinking of these races since last year, especially the 300. I wanted to win it last year, but couldn't quite get it. That is what I have been training for, and I was really nervous coming into it, but did what I needed to do. It was just a great day and I am exhausted."



Tom Koontz is filled with excitement Saturday after his victory in the 110 hurdles Saturday in Wichita.

It was a busy day for Koontz that left him with four state medals around his neck, including two on a pair of relays – the second year in a row he accumulated four.

Still, it was his performance in the 300 that left a lasting impression on him. Koontz had wanted to unseat Muller since the end of last season's state race and had been working hard to do so.

Koontz was trailing Muller heading into the final 100 meters, but the Louisburg senior was able to turn it on and pull away down the stretch.

"You could see it in my face, it was almost shock," Koontz said of the finish. "It was a little bit of relief, amazement, just a lot of different emotions. I don't even remember about a third of the race, I just remember needing to get faster. I worked on the final stretch all week because I knew that would be the most important part."

His race in the 110s was also a memorable one as he got to share it with a pair of teammates. Louisburg dominated the race as juniors Mason Dobbins and Nathan Apple finished second and fourth, respectively, and both set personal records.



Tom Koontz pumps his fist in the air after receiving his gold medal in the 110 hurdles Saturday in Wichita.

“I couldn’t be more thankful,” Koontz said of his teammates. “They have pushed me just as much as I have pushed them. To finish 1, 2 and 4 like we did was just amazing. I have developed a lot of friends over these few years and I consider them some of the best.”

Winning three state titles in the last three years is something Koontz will always remember, but he does leave Louisburg with a little bit of a regret.

“I really wanted Garrett Griffin’s record (110 hurdles), but

beggars can't be choosers," Koontz said. "I am just happy to get one of them and leave my mark."



Caden Caplinger clears 14-6 Friday morning at the state meet in Wichita.

Caplinger cleared a lot of his marks in the pole vault and did so in convincing fashion as he was able to win a state title in just his second year with the program.

Last season at state, Caplinger medaled eighth after he cleared 12-6. A year later, the Louisburg sophomore improved his mark by two feet and is a state champion.

The final vault came down between Caplinger and Eudora's Kole Manley, and after Caplinger cleared 14-6 on his first attempt, Manley wasn't able to get it on his three tries.



Family and friends of Caden Caplinger were all smiles after he secured his first state title in the pole vault.

“I was really shocked, actually,” Caplinger said. “Kole is a really consistent vaulter and I thought he was going to make it for sure. Then when he didn’t, I just couldn’t believe it.”

It was an impressive showing from Caplinger as he didn’t miss an attempt until he tried for 15 feet at the end. He entered the competition at 12-6 and had five straight successful clearances.

“At first I was really nervous, but then it just kind of turned into a routine thing,” Caplinger said. “I started going over heights consistently and the rest just kind of fell into place. I cleared 14-6 earlier this week twice in a row, so I knew I could do it. I was still a little nervous though.”



Caden Caplinger slaps hands with head coach Andy Wright following his gold medal performance in the pole vault Friday in Wichita.

Those three state titles were worth 30 points to the Wildcats and accumulated for nearly half of the team's points that led them to their second consecutive state plaque.

Louisburg won the state championship a year ago and recorded 67 points this year to finish third.

"It is very exciting," Caplinger said. "I just love this group. The group above us (juniors), and below us (freshmen), are going to make another good team next year. I hope that we get to do this again."