

Wildcat wrestling ready to build on last season's historic finish



Louisburg seniors Kaven Bartlett (pictured) and Elijah Eslinger return to lead the Wildcat wrestling team this season after both earned state medals a year ago.

The Louisburg wrestling team had an historic finish to its season last year.

For the first time in school history, the Wildcats finished with three state medalists. The good news for Louisburg, two of them are back for another run at a state title.

Seniors Kaven Bartlett (138 pounds) and Elijah Eslinger (285) return to lead the Wildcats for the 2022-23 season. The two seniors are a part of a 10-member senior class on a team that currently has 40 wrestlers.

Throw in the fact that the wrestlers have a new practice room to work out in, and they are excited for what this season has in store.

“Practices are great,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “We are loving the new wrestling room, and the guys have been working their tails off already. We started off with 45 kids and are down to 40 so far, but I love the wrestlers’ attitudes.”

Bartlett and Eslinger both finished sixth in the state after both made the state semifinals. Eslinger is currently ranked No. 5 in the preseason 4A rankings, while Bartlett is No. 6.



Louisburg senior Elijah Eslinger is currently ranked No. 5 in the Class 4A 285-pound division.

“Both guys have put in a lot of time in the offseason,” Bovaird said. “Kaven and Elijah both had strong finishes to their junior seasons, and the great thing is that they’ve been motivated to improve all throughout the offseason. They both want to wrestle in college and I love the examples they’re setting for the program.”

The Wildcats also return another state qualifier to lead the group in Ashton Moore. The Louisburg sophomore made it to the state tournament as a freshman, but will have to wait a little longer to get on the mat.

Moore is currently out with an injury he sustained during the football season, but Bovaird hopes to have him back after the new year.

“Sitting out is eating away at Ashton, you can tell,” Bovaird said. “Once he gets the all-clear to get back on the mat, he’s going to be a voracious competitor. He’ll need to overcome the

obstacle of lost mat time, but with that kid's work ethic and competitive nature, combined with his strength and athleticism, it'll be a great season for him."



Louisburg sophomore Ashton Moore was a state qualifier as a freshman last season.

Louisburg will have a mix of veterans and newcomers as it begins its journey for the 22-23 season.

Junior J'lee Collins (126 pounds), sophomore Mika McKitrick (132), senior Jesse Murphy (150), sophomore Jay McCaskill (157), sophomore Brayden Yoder (190), senior Trace Eslinger (190/215) and senior Kyle Oram (215) return with at least some varsity experience from a year ago.

The Wildcats will also lean on newcomers Will Showalter (106), freshman Hayden Heffernon (113), freshman Keegan Rogers (120), sophomore Logan Henry (126), senior Aidan Robinson (144), freshman Vance Hahn (165) and senior Brecon Klugman (175) as they will compete for time on the varsity level.

"We'll have some new faces on the mat this season, along with some veterans," Bovaird said. "Will Showalter is a strong athlete and he's finally filling his weight at 106. J'Lee Collins, Mika McKitrick and Logan Henry are going to be

battling for spots at 126-132 early on. Jesse Murphy will be a solid guy at 144 or 150. A couple of sophomores in the higher weights are also going to make some waves in Jay McCaskill at 157 and Brayden Yoder at 190. Also, I've got two seniors at 215 with Trace Eslinger and Kyle Oram."

The Wildcats have high expectations for themselves this season, but Bovaird knows it is all about having the right frame of mind.

"One of our biggest focuses this year will be on our mindset," Bovaird said. "The season motto is 'It's a Psychological Thing,' from the legendary Dan Gable. Gable once said, 'It's a psychological thing. They fear it, but they know they can do it.' This season, we've got lots of experienced kids, but we want to be sure that we peak in February when we're supposed to peak, and we're going to work on overcoming all the psychological obstacles we possibly can.

Louisburg opens its season this Friday as it travels to the Fort Scott Dual Tournament. Matches are set to begin at 3 p.m.