

# Wildcats finish third at Fort Scott to open season



FORT SCOTT – With about half of the team competing in its first varsity action, the Louisburg wrestling team put together a strong showing in its season debut.

The Wildcats traveled to the Fort Scott Dual Tournament last Friday and left with a third place finish and a 3-2 record on the day.

Louisburg got wins over Blue Valley Southwest, Gardner-Edgerton and Anderson County and suffered a pair of close losses to Atchison County and Fort Scott.

“We have a relatively young team, but I’d say they did an awesome job battling on the mat Friday night,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Our veteran wrestlers were scrappy and competitive, and our younger guys did their best to follow that lead.”

Seniors Kaven Bartlett and Elijah Eslinger led the Wildcats as both finished with a 5-0 record after each of them were ranked in the Class 4A preseason rankings.

Bartlett, who is ranked No. 6 at 138 pounds, recorded a pair of major decisions and a pin. He also battled Anderson County’s A.J. Schaffer to a 9-8 decision – an opponent he lost to a year ago.

As for Eslinger, who is the No. 5 heavyweight in Class 4A, he

also won all five matches. He earned three pins and one major decision.

“This season, we’re going to see a lot more confidence from those two guys,” Bovaird said. “They’ve been very driven since last season ended, and I feel like they’re both on a mission to take things up a level from last year. Kaven had a great match against an Anderson County kid who’d beaten him last year.

“After getting a couple of quick takedowns and looking very strong on his feet, Kaven got caught in a weird move and found himself on his back, battling to stay alive. After fighting back to safety, he was then down 7-4, but he kept his composure and chipped away at that lead, one point at a time. He took the lead and held on for a 9-8 decision.”

Sophomore Will Showalter was next on the team with four wins, including a pair of pins, at 106 pounds. Freshman Hayden Heffernon (113 pounds), junior J’Lee Collins (126), senior Jesse Murphy (152), sophomore Jay McCaskill (157), sophomore Braden Yoder (190) and senior Trace Eslinger (215) each finished with three wins

Senior Kyle Oram, who also wrestled at 215, won both of his matches. Freshman Keegan Rogers (120) and sophomore Mika McKitrick (132) both finished with a pair of wins.

Sophomore Logan Henry (132), senior Aidan Robinson (144) and senior Brecon Klugman (175) also won a match.

In its three victories, Louisburg defeated Blue Valley Southwest (56-23), Gardner Edgerton (60-24) and Anderson County (45-36). The Wildcats also suffered close losses to Atchison County (48-34) and Fort Scott (39-38).

Against Fort Scott, the Wildcats needed a pin from Elijah Eslinger in the final match to get the win. However, Fort Scott heavyweight Jaden Garcia kept fighting off Eslinger and

he was only able to get the 11-1 major decision.

“He fought and fought, but that Fort Scott heavyweight was stubborn as can be,” Bovaird said. “Elijah couldn’t quite get the pin, but he came away with a solid 11-1 major decision. That dual came down to bonus points – Fort Scott scored more bonus points than we did. It’s a tough lesson to learn, but one match can make the difference. If we give up fewer pins and we earn more, then that affects the team score.”

The Wildcats will try and improve its dual record Friday when it hosts the December Duals for its home opener. Louisburg will square off with Baldwin, Burlington, Concordia, Independence and Prairie View. Matches are set to begin at 4 p.m.