

Eslinger garners second consecutive state medal



Louisburg senior Elijah Eslinger won his second straight state medal Saturday in Salina at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships as he finished sixth at 285 pounds.

SALINA — Just like a year ago, Elijah Eslinger found himself one win away from a spot in the state championship match.

Eslinger, who has been ranked in Class 4A at different times throughout the season, has had a long road as a Wildcat heavyweight. One that included a rough freshman year, to progressively getting better.

With a spot in the semifinals last Friday at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships already wrapped up, he had already secured his second state medal in Salina.

Still, he wanted more.

The 285-pounder opened the state tournament with a pin of Labette County's Chris Stephens and then earned an 11-4 decision over Pratt's Drake VanScoyoc.

Eslinger squared off with Coffeyville-Field Kindley's Kainen White in the semifinals, and in what was a close match throughout, came up a point short of that finals match in a 3-2 loss.

"To make the semifinals was exciting, especially since it was the closest match I had," Eslinger said. "It was probably

close to the hardest match that I had over the weekend. I feel like I could have done better looking at my matches in hindsight."

The Louisburg senior wrestled two more matches in the consolation bracket on Saturday, but came up short. He fell in an 8-0 major decision to Rose Hill's Miles Colvin and was pinned by Columbus' Jake Eddington in the fifth-place match.

Eslinger wrapped up his high school career with his second straight sixth-place medal and ended his season with 40 wins. Quite an accomplishment from where he began four year ago.

"I'm so proud of Elijah and how far he's come in the past four years," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "He started wrestling in eight grade, but that's just a four-and-a-half week season. He got thrown out against the wolves his freshman year, wrestling 285 for us and taking quite a few lumps. His sophomore year, suddenly something clicked with him and he never really looked back.

"For the past two seasons, he's made the state semifinals, which is an incredible accomplishment. Wrestling has opened up quite a few doors for this young man, and the great thing is that he loves the sport and he wants to continue doing it in college. With the growth he's made in the past four years, I know he's not even close to hitting his peak, and the next four years of his college career will be excited to watch."



Louisburg junior J'Lee Collins earns a pin Friday during the state tournament.

The Wildcats nearly had two more wrestlers earn spots on the medal stand. Junior J'Lee Collins (126 pounds) and sophomore Ashton Moore (175) both made their way to the blood round and needed a win to secure a state medal.

Unfortunately, both Wildcats succumbed to one of the tougher rounds of the state tournament.

Collins lost his opening round match, but responded with a pin of Field Kindley's Pierce Webber in the first round of consolation and then earned a 9-3 decision over Fort Scott's Trace Metcalf.

That set up match for a medal with Abilene's Christopher McClanahan and Collins was pinned in the second period.



Louisburg sophomore Ashton Moore finished his state tournament with a 2-2 record.

As for Moore, he also lost his opening round match, but responded to win his next two. He went on to pin Chanute's Dax Axelson and then outlasted Clearwater's Jacob Finney in a 3-0 decision, before getting pinned by Clay Center's Tucker Jackson in the blood round.

"When you think about it, having two underclassmen make the blood round at state shows a couple of great things," Bovaird said. "First, we've got that experience coming back next year. Second, those guys had the drive and fire to compete and advance that far against some pretty tough competition. Both are incredible athletes and role models. Their experience at state this year will be huge with their leadership next season and beyond.

"J'Lee is just a positive-minded guy who knows how to work hard and overcome adversity. Ashton is an exemplar when it comes to the idea of hard work, and his athletic prowess is going to take him far."

The Wildcats also experienced some heartbreak as senior Kaven Bartlett fell short of his goal of earning another state

medal. At 138 pounds, Bartlett finished the state tournament with a 1-2 record.



Louisburg senior Kaven Bartlett ended his final state tournament with a 1-2 record.

Bartlett lost a close 2-1 decision to Anderson County's AJ Schaffer to open the tournament, before rallying to defeat Ulysses' Braysen Salinas in a 3-2 decision.

He then squared off with Paola's Ryan Pankov in the consolation cross-bracket and fell in a 6-0 decision.

Bartlett amassed more than 100 career wins as a Wildcat and finished his year with a 37-6 record, to go along with his state medal last season.

"The thing about Kaven is that his wrestling career is far from over," Bovaird said. "He's going to wrestle at Newman University next year, and this sport has done so much for him. He understands that, and he's grateful for all the opportunities he's had. He's helped give back to our wrestling community, not only as a competitor and leader on the mat, but also with our youth club as a coach.

“Seeing his senior year come to an end the way it did was truly heartbreaking, and I wish we could go back and have a redo at so many things. That’s the way the sport – and life – goes, unfortunately. We don’t get do-overs, and we can’t go back and fix things. We can only move forward, and I think that’s the chief lesson that Kaven has taken from his experience as a wrestler. It’s made him the young man he is today, and I firmly believe that he’s going to make a huge difference in the world.”



Louisburg senior Trace Eslinger works to hold down Prairie View's Dayton Kline.

Senior Trace Eslinger (215) and sophomore Jay McCaskill (157) also represented the Wildcats at the state tournament, but finished with an 0-2 record.

Trace lost to the defending state champion in the first round and nearly won his first consolation match, but was outlasted by Prairie View's Dayton Kline in a 5-4 loss.

McCaskillll was pinned by McPherson's Cooper Reves in his first match, and in the first round of consolation, lost a close 4-2 decision to Fort Scott's Lennox Vann.



Sophomore Jay McCaskill tries to get an opponent on his back during his 157-pound state tournament match.

“Both of those guys were able to get this far by battling through quite a bit of adversity,” Bovaird said. “Jay hurt his knee at the Blue Valley Northwest Invitational toward the end of January, and he really didn’t get much time back on the mat before regionals. That’s quite a bit of mat time lost, and he still made the regional finals.

“Trace lost two entire seasons of high school wrestling due to injuries, and even this year, he was at a disadvantage because he competed at 215 and routinely weighed in under 190. I’m so proud of Trace for making such huge strides through his career and I’m glad to see he was able to end things with a trip to state. Jay has got so much potential, and I’m excited to see what he’s able to accomplish the next two years for us.”