

# Wildcats' state title hopes fall half-point short as they earn runner-up honors



*Members of the Louisburg boys Class 4A state runner-up track and field team are (front row, from left) Cooper Wingfield, Ethan Ptacek, J.R. Rooney, Blaise Vohs, Myles Vohs, Colton Blue, Hunter Heinrich, Cade Gassman; (back row) head coach Andy Wright, coach Alex Gentges, Caden Caplinger, Nathan Vincent, Mason Dobbins, Nathan Apple, Colyer Wingfield, Jerynce Brings Plenty and coaches John Reece and Shelby Suther.*

WICHITA – The Louisburg boys track and field team had the resume of a state champion.

The Wildcats racked up 87 points during last weekend's Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championships at Wichita State.

Louisburg medaled in all 13 events it competed and the Wildcats finished the meet with two individual state champions. The ending was supposed to feature the Wildcats holding up a state championship plaque.

“If you would have told me at the beginning of the year we would score 87 points at state and not win a championship, I would have just ignored you and said ‘Whatever,’” Louisburg coach Andy Wright said. “No way that would happen.”

As it turned out, the Wildcats found themselves on the outside looking in for a team state title. Andale finished first with 87.5 points. Louisburg had 87.

It was an emotional letdown for the Wildcats as they were so close to that team goal.

“To beat Andale, we had to score 88 and that is just a testament to how good they are,” Wright said. “They have really good athletes, especially in the throws. At the same time, I couldn’t be more proud of my guys and how they competed. It was just so much fun to watch them lay it all out there. They really did have a great season.”



***The Louisburg boys track and field team stood on the podium with their state runner-up plaque Saturday following the Class 4A state meet at Wichita State’s Cessna Stadium.***

As much success as Louisburg had throughout the state meet, the Wildcats always found themselves trying to rein in Andale and couldn’t quite overtake the Indians.

Andale scored 48 of its points in the throws to get the Indians off to a good start. Louisburg opened the state meet with 18 points in the pole vault with Caden Caplinger and

Cooper Wingfield's top two finish and another 10 in the high jump on Mason Dobbins' state title.

Senior Nathan Vincent was able to help keep the Wildcats within striking distance as he scored points in all three throwing events, while Dobbins and Nathan Apple scored key points in the hurdles.

Sophomore Jerynce Brings Plenty medaled in two individual distance events, while the 4×100 and 4×800 relays also earned the Wildcats big points.

Louisburg also had to overcome an injury bug as Ashton Moore, the 4×100 anchor, suffered an injury in the prelims and Ethan Ptacek had to fill his spot. Ptacek came through as the Wildcats were still able to get third in the relay.

Despite all that success, the Wildcats were on the brink of elimination from the state race going into the 200-meter dash – the second-to-last event. Louisburg was down 11.5 points to Andale.

It was all up to Dobbins. After the prelims on Friday, Dobbins had the seventh fastest time in the event and he had to finish at least fifth to keep the Wildcats mathematically alive.

He did more than that. In his final race as a Wildcat, Dobbins came through as he took third in 23.07 seconds and scored six points for Louisburg. Dobbins, who was running in lane 1, was just .02 seconds behind the runner-up finisher.



***Mason Dobbins finished third in the 200 dash to keep the Wildcats' state title hopes alive going into the last event.***

"I got to see him grow up the last three years," Wright said of Dobbins. "Mason ran an unbelievable race and he did it in a really difficult lane to run in. He knew what he had to do to keep his team in it and he really came through big time. His mental toughness was what stuck out to me and what impressed me the most about him at state."

With seemingly new life, the Wildcats were now just 5.5 points back of Andale and the Louisburg 4x400 relay of junior Hunter Heinrich, freshman Blaise Vohs, senior Colyer Wingfield and senior Ethan Ptacek needed to get third place for the Wildcats to hoist the state championship plaque.

"Once Mason took third, then I could see those 4x400 guys really start to warm up and get serious," Wright said. "They knew what was on the line."

All the relay team did was a run 3-second personal best and was .25 seconds off the school record. They put together a state championship-level performance.



***Louisburg senior Ethan Ptacek takes off on his anchor leg of the 4×400-meter relay Saturday in Wichita.***

Unfortunately, it still wasn't enough. Bishop Miege edged Louisburg for third place and the Wildcats finished as the state runner-up.

"I knew they would be competitive," Wright said of the relay. "I had different people running it at the beginning of the year. Found the four I wanted and getting Ethan healthy again was huge. He was the main guy for that relay to be successful, but Colyer ran amazing legs as well. It was great to see the other guys in Blaise, who is freshman, run strong and Hunter is a good first leg and he always keeps us in the running.

"However, the race they put together was unbelievable. To cut three seconds off their time and almost get a school record, that was something I don't know that I saw coming. They competed so hard. They wanted it for their teammates."

It was an emotional scene afterward as the Andale team celebrated, while Wildcats had the feeling of a game-winning shot in a state basketball game, just rimming out. They were

*THAT* close to their second state title in three years.

The run Louisburg track has been on the last three seasons has been a memorable one. The Wildcats won a state title in 2021, took third in 2022 and now second this season.

Even in 2020, the Wildcats were also primed to reach the state podium as a team, but the season was cancelled due to COVID.

“We have been pretty fortunate to have a lot of great athletes come through the program these last few years,” Wright said. “It has been a lot of fun watching all of them compete and grow over time.

“We had so many kids do great things. We can be upset for finishing second at state, but we cannot be upset about the effort. The kids gave everything they had. I’m so proud of all of them for what they accomplished this year.”