

# State qualifiers return to lead Wildcat wrestling in 23-24



*Louisburg senior J'Lee Collins is one of three state qualifiers to return to lead the Louisburg wrestling team this upcoming season.*

After rolling with some younger lineups the last couple of years, the Louisburg wrestling team is starting to see that experience come to light and the Wildcats are hoping for big things for the 2023-24 season.

The Wildcats return three state qualifiers from a year ago and will feature a full 14-member lineup. Out of the 14, 11 are juniors and seniors.

In all, Louisburg has 37 wrestlers out this season and head coach Bobby Bovaird has liked what he has seen so far in practice.

"We have a little less than we've had the last couple of seasons, but I'm still happy with the numbers we've got out," Bovaird said. "The level of experience has increased from

previous years, which helps us move quicker in our progression throughout the season.

“We’ve been having some great practices. The team is staying healthy and working really hard. We have excellent attitudes from our leaders, and our newcomers are falling right in with the program.”

The Wildcats sent six wrestlers to the state tournament a season ago and three of them are coming back to lead this year’s group. Senior J’Lee Collins, and juniors Ashton Moore and Jay McCaskill, will all aim to get back there again.

Another junior, Brayden Yoder, just missed out on a state tournament bid last season and Bovaird is looking to those four to help lead the way this year.



***Junior Ashton Moore will wrestle at 190 pounds for the Wildcats after earning a state bid last year at 175.***

“Just watching those four guys in the practice room, it’s

awesome to see their work ethic and leadership,” Bovaird said. “It’s infectious, too. Brayden and Ashton roll with some of our bigger guys, J’Lee is pushing the lower weights, and Jay is right there in the middle weights. Ashton and J’Lee were both a match from finishing in the top 6 at state, and Jay was bouncing back from a nasty knee injury. If he’d had a full season, he would have been ready to make a very strong showing at state. Brayden, despite not making it to state, had an incredible sophomore season.”

In the lower weights, freshman Levi Cotter will open for the Wildcats at 106 pounds, while junior Canaan Clayton will take hold of the 113 pound spot.

Junior Will Showalter and Collins will wrestle at 120 and 126 pounds, respectively, and both are two of the four team captains. Sophomore Tyson Blancarte or junior Logan Henry will wrestle at 132.

Junior Mika McKitrick, another team captain, will wrestle at 138 pounds. Seniors Traden Noll and Colin Robinson will wrestle at 144 and 150 pounds, respectively, while McCaskill will stay at his 157 pound weight from last season.



***Louisburg junior Jay McCaskill will wrestle at 157 pounds this year after earning a state bid a year ago.***

Freshman Bryce Thompson and sophomore Vance Hahn will see time at 165 pounds and senior Elias Pugh is at 175 pounds. Moore, a team captain, will bump up to 190 pounds this season.

Yoder (215) and junior Xander Lucas (285) will be among the Wildcat heavyweights this season.

Louisburg will also add a pair of wrestlers to its girls team. Freshman Leola Eslinger (145) and Allison Martin (125) will be the lone Wildcats this season.

“We’re still getting started on the girls side, but we’re bringing in a freshman with great youth wrestling experience in Leola,” Bovaird said. “Allison, while she is new to the sport of wrestling, she’s got experience with jiu jitsu, which will help her quite a bit.”

The Wildcats will open their season Friday at the Fort Scott

Dual Tournament. It will be the first of many challenges for Louisburg as its ventures through the Frontier League and several other difficult 4A programs.

“We will have a pretty solid team, top to bottom,” Bovaird said. “We have lots of kids with varsity experience, as well as kids bringing in some great youth wrestling experience. We’re in a tough league with teams like Baldwin, Paola, Bonner Springs, Spring Hill and Tonganoxie, but I think we’ll be pretty competitive within the Frontier League, as well as in Class 4A.”