

DeWeese, Eslinger punch tickets to state tournament



Louisburg freshman Brooklyn DeWeese works for a pin during the Class 4A East Regional tournament Friday in Paola. DeWeese and Leola Eslinger became the first Wildcat girls to qualify for state.

PAOLA – For the first time in school history, the Louisburg girls wrestling program will have a representative at the state tournament – well, make that two.

Freshman Brooklyn DeWeese and sophomore Leola Eslinger punched their tickets to state Saturday at the Class 4A East Regional tournament at Paola High School as the top eight in each weight class earned a spot at the state tournament in Salina on Feb. 28

It was a moment many in the Wildcat program won't soon forget.

“It was such an incredible moment – not just for Leola and Brooklyn, but also for the LHS wrestling program,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Having our first state qualifiers for the girls wrestling program is such a huge milestone, but it’s an even bigger testament to all the hard work they’ve put in to the sport.

“Watching them reach this milestone in our program’s history was very emotional, not just for me, but for all the coaches – Shawn Crossley, Heather Eslinger, and Andy Wright. All three of them have had a hand in these girls’ growth before they ever got to high school. Leola and Brooklyn are raising the bar for our future girls wrestlers, and I have no doubt that they’re not even close to being finished with what they intend to accomplish in their careers.

DeWeese was the first Wildcat to qualify after going 1-1 on the first day of action on Friday at 115 pounds. In her blood round match Saturday, DeWeese pinned Holton’s Khloe Black in the second period to secure her spot.

In the battle to reach the fifth place match, DeWeese lost by pin to Wellsville’s Brinlee Hartman. In the seventh place match, DeWeese then lost a tough 1-0 decision to Frontenac’s Abby Albright to finish in eighth overall.

As for Eslinger, she battled her way through the 145 pound bracket. After losing her first match of the day Friday, she bounced back to end her day with a pin of Labette County’s Katy Tyler to advance to the blood round Saturday.

In that match, Eslinger upset No. 4 seed Adalize Arevalo from Bishop Ward with a 12-4 major decision. After losing by pin to Paola’s Shaelynn Smail, in the next consolation match, Eslinger ended her tournament with a win in a 11-6 decision over No. 3 seed Brooklyn Collingsworth of Columbus to take seventh overall.

“Both girls wrestled their hearts out,” Bovaird said. “I can’t

even begin to describe how much heart and determination they showed. Brooklyn (DeWeese) was aggressive and stayed composed in tough matches, really showcasing her growth this season as a freshman. Leola fought through some challenging moments and never backed down, showing resilience and grit. Both of them stepped up when it mattered most, and they absolutely earned their spots at state.”



Louisburg sophomore Leola Eslinger pulls her opponent to the mat Friday in Paola. Eslinger finished 7th at the Class 4A East Regional and qualified for state.

The Wildcats nearly had two others qualify for state as well. Freshman Brianna Caraway (130 pounds) and sophomore Maliya Collins (140) both lost their blood round matches.

Caraway went 1-1 on Friday, but in her blood round match Saturday, fell to Holton’s Jacey Willard as she lost by pin. Collins also went 1-1 on Friday, but was pinned in her blood

round match by Fort Scott's Kynlee Hampton.

"Brianna and Maliya had outstanding seasons," Bovaird said. "When you think about it, they're both relatively new to the high school level. Brianna is a freshman with a couple years experience at the youth level and Maliya is a sophomore with this being her first year on the mat. They both made huge strides with their technique, confidence, and mat awareness.

"Coming that close to state – wrestling in the "blood round" – is a tough accomplishment, but it also speaks to how competitive they have been all season long. They put in the work, battled hard every match, and showed that they're right there with the best. I have no doubt they'll use this as motivation for next season."



Louisburg sophomore Maliya Collins works for a pin Friday during her regional match in Paola.

It also marked the end for Wildcat wrestlers Allison Martin and Nora Smith, who also saw their season come to a close.

“All of our girls showed an incredible amount of growth over the season,” Bovaird said. “Allison Martin finished her second season with a 15-16 record for us, and Nora Smith showed more courage and toughness than nearly anyone else on the team with her commitment. Our six girls who competed in the regional tournament couldn’t have done any better representing our program, and that’s a huge testament to their character, their dedication, and their parents’ guidance along the way. Girls wrestling in Louisburg has been a long time coming, and I think with these girls’ seasons, you can say it’s finally landed.”