

# Yoder, Moore win regional titles as Wildcats qualify five for state



***Louisburg senior Brayden Yoder pounds his chest after his upset victory over Chanute's Cade Small in the semifinals of the 190-pound bracket Saturday at the Class 4A regional tournament.***

ALTAMONT — In a day full of competition, five Louisburg wrestlers saw their season extended for another week.

Ashton Moore and Brayden Yoder earned regional titles Saturday at the Class 4A regional tournament Saturday at Labette County High School, while Mika McKitrick, Canaan Clayton and Levi Cotter all punched their tickets as well to the state tournament.

In a day full of ups and downs, Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird

was happy to see those five move on to the final week of the season.

“Regionals is always a tournament where we experience the highest of highs and the lowest of lows,” Bovaird said. “Seeing kids like Mika, Brayden and Levi qualify after having such awesome seasons was awesome to witness. The guys who did make it through to state earned their way, and I’m so excited for how they get to end their season this weekend in Salina.”

Maybe no one had a better day than Yoder, who came in as the No. 5 seed in the 190-pound bracket and upset his way to a regional crown.

Yoder (34-10) opened the tournament with a 4-1 decision over Frontenac’s Alonzo Burke and then squared off with Chanute’s Cade Small, who was also the tournament’s No. 1 seed.

The Louisburg senior jumped out to an early 3-point lead on a takedown in the semifinals and held off Small for a 4-2 decision to earn his first-ever state berth. It was also a big win for Yoder in the rankings as Small was No. 4 in the state.



***Brayden Yoder gets a takedown of Paola's Maxwell Worden in the finals of the 190-pound bracket.***

"Qualifying for state was my main goal going into the regional tournament," Yoder said. "I had gotten so close in years past so to be able to finally reach that milestone, especially in such a big way, was really special."

That one win wasn't enough for Yoder, however. He squared off with Paola's Maxwell Worden for the regional championship. Worden knocked off Yoder in the Frontier League title match two weeks earlier, but Yoder got the best of him this time in a 13-6 decision to win his first regional title.

It was a special moment, not only for Yoder, but also for his teammates, including Moore.

"Watching Brayden win his own regional title was probably my favorite part of the whole tournament," Moore said. "We've

been practice partners since third grade, so me and Brayden have gotten to be really close. Everyday I see the hard work and dedication he put into it. So, to see all that pay off at the perfect time was awesome.”

Last season, both Moore and Yoder were in opposite weight classes. Moore was 190 and Yoder was forced to wrestle at 215, while giving up a good amount of weight. The two have flipped this season and the change has been a perfect fit for the both of them.

“I think wrestling 215 last year really just taught me how to deal with adversity,” Yoder said. “Giving up the amount of weight that I did was definitely a challenge. Still, I prided myself on working hard despite my struggles, so to finally see my efforts pay off is a really gratifying feeling.”

As for Moore, he came into Saturday’s tournament as the No. 1 seed at 215 pounds and the favorite to win it. The Louisburg senior, and No. 2 ranked wrestler in the state handled his business with a 4-0 record and three pins.





***Louisburg senior Ashton Moore picks up an opponent for a takedown Saturday at the 4A regional tournament at Labette County.***

Moore (38-2) opened the tournament with a pin of Iola's Alston Nelson and did the same in the quarterfinals against Chanute's Karter Naff. He got a test in the semifinals against Columbus' Kash Smith.

It was a close match into the third period, but Moore was able to get the pin late in the match to move onto the finals. It was there where he met Prairie View's Parker Schwarz for the third time this season and Moore earned the 4-1 decision for the regional title.

"I was super grateful to win my first regional championship," Moore said. "Being at different regionals throughout high school, it's always been a big deal to me watching the guys in

the championship compete, so to be the one there winning it this year was a great feeling. Overall I feel like I wrestled solid on Saturday. I got to wrestle several guys I haven't seen before and I think that was a great opportunity to feel out some of the other competition."

McKitrick (32-15), who wrestled at 132 pounds, qualified for his first state tournament and overcame some early adversity to do it. The Louisburg senior was pinned in his first round match after taking an early lead.



***Louisburg's Mika McKitrick celebrates after qualifying for state at 132 pounds.***

He worked his way through the back side of the bracket as he rattled off four consecutive wins, including a pin of Osawatomie's Dayne Odgen in his blood round match. He then earned a technical fall over Girard's Gage Short in his third place match to avenge his lone loss of the day.

As for Clayton (24-15), he earned a second straight trip to



the state tourney. At 120 pounds, he went 2-2 on the day, but won his consolation semifinals match with a 7-2 decision over Parsons' Mario Zacarias to punch his ticket.

In the third place match, Clayton battled Osawatomie's Caden Peterson, but was pinned.



***Louisburg senior Canaan Clayton picks up the leg of an opponent Saturday at 120 pounds.***

Cotter was the lone underclassman to qualify for state as he took fourth at 106 pounds. Cotter (34-12) advanced to the semifinals, where he lost by pin to Paola's Sawyer Blue.

In his blood round match, Cotter earned a second period pin of Coffeyville's Jarvis Hall to qualify for state. In the third place match, he lost a 15-8 decision to Prairie View's Ryan Nickell.

"Levi has been a strong wrestler for us over the last couple seasons, and I'm so happy that he made it to state," Bovaird

said. "He's the kind of wrestler who got a later start in the sport, but he's making huge strides to catch up with the kids who've been wrestling a long time. He's so strong on his feet, and that nearly got him into the finals. Canaan has been such a great addition to the program. I've coached him since he started the sport with our club years ago, and to see him earn his way to become a 2-time state qualifier is an awesome thing.

"Mika had a heartbreaking loss in the quarterfinals to a Girard kid he'd beaten earlier in the season. That made his road to state a little more difficult, but along the way he got a revenge win against an Osawatomie wrestler and then a rematch in the consolation finals against the Girard kid. This time, he put aside all doubt with another revenge win."



***Louisburg sophomore Levi Cotter puts an opponent on his back Saturday at 106 pounds.***

Even with all the good news, several Wildcats saw their



seasons come to a close. Senior Jay McCaskill, junior Vance Hahn and freshman Parker Showalter all made it to the blood round, but finished one win short of state.

It was especially tough for McCaskill, who was trying to qualify for his third straight state tourney, but ended his Wildcat career in a tough 165-pound bracket.

“Jay got hurt with a serious ankle sprain in the league finals,” Bovaird said. “We were worried that it might have been something worse, but thankfully we got good news from his doctor. He worked his way back to as strong a place as he could get over the last two weeks, but that sprain was still something nagging at him.

“Jay has had a very successful career with the program – a 100-match winner, having two 30-win seasons, and a 2-time state qualifier. The other two years he didn’t qualify, he was in the blood round and so close. He’s been a workhorse for us, and a silent leader. Talk about a heartbreaking end to his career. I feel horrible for him, but I hope he knows that we are so proud and he is going to have a whole lot more success in his life beyond the mat.”

Now those five Wildcats will prepare for the state tournament this week that begins at 9 a.m. Friday morning in Salina. The double elimination tournament runs through Saturday.

“This tournament is always one of the most exciting events of the season, and I’m looking forward to seeing our wrestlers leave it all on the mat,” Bovaird said. “Every year, I remind myself to take in these moments and appreciate the hard work and dedication that goes into getting here. It’s a special experience, and this one, in particular, feels even more meaningful.”