Moore leads Wildcat wrestling with state runner-up finish



Louisburg senior Ashton Moore wrestles in the 215-pound state championship Saturday in Salina. Moore finished second overall.

SALINA – In the final match of his wrestling career, Ashton Moore found himself competing for a state championship.

It was exactly the place he envisioned himself being, even before the season started. The result, however, was a different story.

Moore's dreams of a state title were dashed Saturday at the Class 4A state wrestling tournament in Salina. Smoky Valley's Parker Gardner ended his run with a 13-5 major decision at 215 pounds.

As disappointing as the loss was for Moore, looking back on

his long wrestling career helped ease the pain – as did the second place state medal.

“It was tough taking that loss,” Moore said. “I was pretty down about it, but then I had a moment that put things more into perspective for me. After our practice on Friday, Coach (Bobby) Bovaird took us up to the top of the arena to talk about the tournament. Sitting there I remembered being in that same spot as a sixth grader watching the championship round there. At that age I thought those guys were amazing and the toughest people I’d ever seen.

“So after my loss I thought back to that moment being a sixth grader and I was able to realize how far I’ve come. To see myself at that level now made me very proud I was able to make it to that stage.”

Moore, who finished the season with a 41-3 record, had a successful first day on Friday. He opened with a pin of Hiawatha’s Gabrial Johnson in the first round.

In the quarterfinals, Moore earned a 4-2 decision over Augusta’s Devin Carroll. Then, in the semifinals, Moore faced off with a familiar Frontier League foe in Ottawa’s Seth Ferguson.



Louisburg senior Ashton Moore earned a second place medal Saturday at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. He ended his season with a 41-3 record.

Moore took care of business as he won an 8-4 decision over Ferguson to advance to the championship against Gardner.

Gardner got on the board early against Moore as he registered three takedowns of the Louisburg senior to build a big lead.

“That championship match was a tough one,” Moore said. “I hadn’t seen that kid at any other tournaments, so I didn’t know a ton about him. He had a quick single leg and you don’t see that much at heavier weights like 215.

“Overall I really enjoyed this year. I was lucky enough to have a full season and be able to finish out my season healthy. It was a very bittersweet moment when that last match was over, but I’m very grateful I got to spend these last four years with such great teammates and coaches.”

Despite the loss, it was a still a successful season for Moore who recorded his second straight state medal and became the ninth Wildcat to wrestle for a state crown.

“Watching Ashton earn his way to the state championship match was incredible,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “He put in so much work throughout the season and he’s been an outstanding leader for our program. Being able to sit in his corner at that level on the biggest stage was really special.

“Finishing as the state runner-up is a huge accomplishment, and I couldn’t be prouder of how he competed and represented our program. This is the seventh straight year our program has had a state semifinalist, and Ashton is now one of nine Louisburg wrestlers who have earned the title of state finalist.”

The Wildcat program also had six other wrestlers compete at the state tournament, including two on the girls side.

Louisburg senior Brayden Yoder went 1-1 on Friday at 190 pounds after a close 3-2 loss to Mulvane’s Cameron Hagerman in the first round, but Yoder bounced back to get a 11-3 major decision over Goodland’s Logan Franz.



Louisburg senior Brayden Yoder finished 1-2 at the Class 4A state wrestling tournament in Salina.

In his first match on Saturday, Yoder was eliminated by Abilene's Pierce Casteel. Yoder lost by a 4-1 decision ending his season with a 35-12 record.

Seniors Canaan Clayton (120), Mika McKitrick (132) and sophomore Levi Cotter (106) each finished the tournament with an 0-2 mark.

On the girls side, sophomore Leola Eslinger went 1-1 on the first day at 145 pounds. After she was pinned in her first match by Marysville's Ella Johnson, Eslinger responded with a pin of her own against Prairie View's Kimberlee Eastwood in the first round of consolation to earn the program's first state win.

Eslinger (23-19) saw her season come to a close in her first match Saturday after she was pinned in the second period by Pratt's Miranda Webb.



Louisburg sophomore Leola Eslinger records a takedown Saturday at the state tournament in Salina.

Freshman Brooklyn DeWeese (31-13) went 0-2 at 115 pounds in what was her first state tournament.

“It’s always tough when you see kids put in the time, the effort, and the sacrifice, only to come up just short of their goal,” Bovaird said. “In that way, wrestling can be a pretty brutal sport. Thursday night after we had our last practice, I talked to the team about the idea of competitive greatness, inspired by the great John Wooden. I told them that they needed to be prepared, to be disciplined, and to be focused.

“This one tournament will not define their season or who they are as competitors; they’ve accomplished great things already and they’ve prepared themselves for something much bigger than just a single tournament like state. Each of them grew and improved, and that’s what really matters in the long run.”

The state tournament ended what was a successful season for

the Wildcat program as they try and build for the future.

“It has definitely been a season of growth for our program, and we’ve made a ton of huge milestones,” Bovaird said. “I’m especially proud of how this group of wrestlers has contributed to the foundation of our program. We had wrestlers pushing themselves to new levels, we had a strong presence at the state tournament, and we continued to make an impact in our sport. While we always aim for more, I’m proud of the work these athletes put in. The young men and women in this program are building something special, and this season was definitely another major step forward for us, for a lot of reasons. We had our first girls state qualifiers with Brooklyn and Leola. We boasted our biggest numbers ever (65 total, with 54 boys and 11 girls). We had our first ever girls dual. We had another winning dual season, and we finished in the top 3 at Frontier League after several seasons toward the bottom.

“The season motto was ‘Carpe Diem’ (Seize the Day), and from day one, that’s what we asked our kids to do. They learned to step up and face adversity, take on opportunities, and be fearless in the face of challenges. In the bigger scheme of things, that’s what it’s all about. Not winning matches, medals, or trophies, but learning how to be champions in life. I’m proud to say that the young athletes who stick it out through our tough sport will emerge much better prepared for being successful beyond the mat.”