

Opinion: Time to look back and enjoy successes



The Louisburg High School football team was one of many bright spots for LHS athletics this past school year.

We live in a world where, especially in sports, we often don't take time to reflect on our accomplishments – and instead we are in a rush to move on to the next set of obstacles.

In reality, we are in a “what have you done for me lately” society and sometimes don't remember, or enjoy, those special moments where our hard work has paid off.

Yes, I understand you don't want to relish in those accomplishments as that doesn't make you a better athlete, or whatever your specialty may be, but not taking the time to enjoy the ride can be detrimental.

And what a ride it was for Louisburg High School athletics this past season.

The Wildcats had a special year in several sports, and before we focus on the 2017-18 campaign, we should look back at what the 16-17 season brought us. Just take a look at what these Wildcats accomplished.

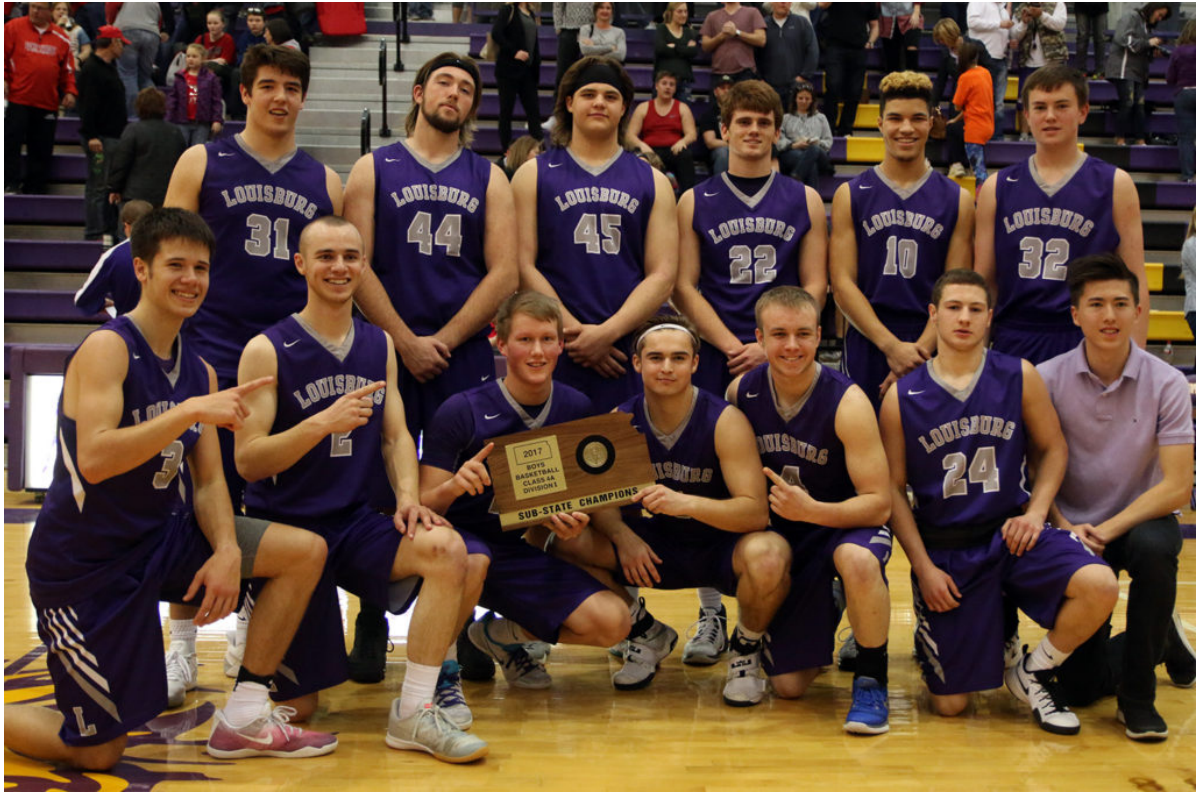
- There is probably no better place to start than the Louisburg soccer teams. Both the boys and girls teams earned spots in the state semifinals for the first time

in program history and both finished fourth. The boys team made it to state for the first time in their 14 years, while the girls advanced to the state tournament in just their second season.



The Louisburg High School girls soccer team finished fourth in the state in just their second season. The Wildcat boys also finished fourth as they advanced to the state semifinals for the first time in program history.

- It was quite the season for the Wildcat boys basketball team as they advanced to the state tournament for the first time since 2005. Louisburg won its sub-state tournament with a 64-52 win over Fort Scott in the championship game.



The Louisburg boys basketball team qualified for state for the first time since 2005.

- The Louisburg football team made quite the run in the 2016 season. The Wildcats won their first playoff game since 2012 and earned a regional title in the process with a win over Independence. Even though their season came to an end in the next round to eventual state champion Bishop Miege, the Wildcats' still finished with an 8-3 record.
- Wrestling had another big season as the Wildcats qualified eight for the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. Although Ryan Adams was the lone state medalist, as he finished sixth overall at 138 pounds, the Wildcats tied a school record for number of state qualifiers that was set back in 1984.
- In cross country, the Wildcats sent three runners to the state meet and had their first state medalist since 2006 when freshman Trinity Moore finished 19th overall, as she, Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith competed at the Wamego meet. Moore was also the school's first female runner to earn a state medal.

- Freshman golfer Calvin Dillon became the Wildcats' first state medalist in several years as he finished 10th at the Class 4A state tournament and was one of two Wildcats, along with Ty Martin, to qualify for state. Dillon could quite possibly be the first freshman golfer in school history to get a medal, but since golf stats aren't quite as well kept, it is hard to tell for sure.
- T.J. Dover and Isabelle Holtzen came through with state medals of their own following the state track meet. Holtzen finished seventh at the Class 4A meet in the pole vault and Dover was eighth in the discus as both medaled for the first time. Holtzen also broke the school record in the pole vault earlier in the season after she cleared 11 feet, 1 inch.
- The girls basketball and softball teams both had big improvements from a season ago as they each reached 10 wins despite falling in the first round of their sub-state and regional tournaments. Softball doubled their win total from 2016, while the girls basketball team improved by seven victories.
- The Louisburg volleyball team advanced to the sub-state championship game against rival Paola and was just a few points away from advancing to its fifth consecutive state tournament. The Lady Cats also finished the season with 23 victories.

Most schools across the state would love to have the kind of success Louisburg experienced this year and to me that doesn't seem like it is talked about enough.

Sometimes we get caught up in losses or not meeting expectations, when in fact, compared to a lot of schools, Louisburg exceeds expectations – at least it does mine.

Could these programs be better? Sure they could and the coaches would be the first to tell you. At the same time, we all need to take a step back, look at the big picture and enjoy the success we have.

To me, Louisburg athletics is as healthy as it has been in a long time.

A lot has been made about all the coaches that have left recently. Louisburg will have four new head coaches this upcoming school year and several new assistants.

Some people have considered this a mass exodus due problems at the school. It couldn't be further from the truth. A lot of it is just coincidence. For some it was retirement, others wanted to spend more time with family and a few more just wanted a change.

Former activities director Darin Gagenbin left to be closer to his family and work in the town where he lives. I know all about how great of an opportunity that is and it is the same thing I did almost 10 years ago when I moved here with my family. Working in the town you live in is something you can't put a value on.

Louisburg found a great replacement in Jeremy Holloway, who has been with the district for 17 years and is invested in the community. The school has also brought in a lot of new, young coaches that have come in with excitement and new ideas.

It is bittersweet for me as a lot of those coaches I had a chance to get to know really well are now gone. Although I am mainly a solo operation, I consider a lot of them my co-workers and it stinks to see them move on, but I also know they are doing the best for themselves and their families.

The same could be said for the class of 2017. The group of seniors I worked with this past year were great to get to know, just like all the senior classes before them.

I appreciated all their support and what I do could not be done without those kids. It is great to see them grow up and watch them become successful outside the classroom. I am not a teacher or coach, but still appreciate all they accomplish.

With 2016-17 in the rear view mirror, it will soon be time to focus on the upcoming season and I couldn't be more excited to see what accomplishments this group of Wildcats have in store. It has all the makings of a fun and special year.

Gagnebin steps down as LHS activities director



Louisburg High School activities director Darin Gagnebin presents the Wildcat girls soccer team with their regional championship trophy last month. Gagnebin resigned his post earlier this month to take a similar position in Paola.

Darin Gagnebin has a fondness for Louisburg High School, his coaches and students.

That made it all the more hard to say goodbye.

Gagnebin resigned his post as LHS assistant principal and activities director earlier this month to tentatively take the same position at Paola High School. His last day in Louisburg was last week.

Gagnebin spent a total of 17 years in the Louisburg school

district, with the last six spent as activities director. He was also a teacher and coach for 11 years.

Family was the biggest reason he decided to make the move. Gagnebin and his family currently reside in Paola and his two children attend schools in Paola.

“People have come and gone, but it is still family here,” Gagnebin said. “I am comfortable here and Louisburg has done a lot for me. I just can’t pass up an opportunity to be where my kids are at. I know I could have brought my kids here, but my wife and I made that decision a long time ago of where we were going to live because of where she taught and I taught. I never thought back when we first moved to Paola and when we had kids, that we would be in this position.”

It was a difficult decision for Gagnebin as he leaves behind a group of coaches, several of whom he recently hired. The Louisburg district had a number of new coaches come on board for the upcoming school year.

“We have gone through some trials in the last couple of years and that is with any school,” Gagnebin said. “I told my wife, that if this was going to happen the way it did and I could pick the time, I wish the timing would have happened two years down the road. I would have loved to see what this young group of teachers and coaches are going to do coming in.

“I told my wife that I was really excited about coming back next year and I felt we made some good hires. We have a passionate coaching staff coming on and they are great people with new ideas. It just happened out of the blue.”

The opening came when former Paola High School principal Phil Bressler took the new principal job at Pittsburg High School. Paola assistant principal and activities director Jeff Hines was elevated to the Paola principal position, which left the Panthers needing an activities director.

It can be traced back even further when the Pittsburg High School journalism class wrote an investigative piece that ousted its newly hired principal, which forced the school to reopen the position and eventually hired Bressler.

“Had Pittsburg’s journalism class not done their job, we wouldn’t be sitting here talking right now,” Gagnebin said.

The Paola position was an opportunity Gagnebin just couldn’t pass up as he will have an opportunity to watch more of his children’s events and work closer to home.

“I have missed a lot of my own kids’ stuff,” he said. “But the people here have been really great, (Principal) Tammy (Thomasson) now and Dave (Tappan) before her, to let me try to get to as much stuff as I can. I still miss things. These opportunities don’t come around very often and I just figured this would be a great fit for me and my family.

“But I couldn’t ask for a better group of coaches here in Louisburg. They are good and passionate about what they do. I really have developed some good bonds over the years. I know some have left and some have stayed on, but the coaches and staff I have had has been great.”

Changes to classification system will impact Louisburg



Member schools in the Kansas State High School Activities Association sent ripples across the state last week when they passed two proposals that will affect high school athletics beginning in the 2018-19 season.

For football, the two 4A divisions and Class 2-1A have been eliminated. They have been replaced with 32 team classifications in 4A, 5A and 6A, while 3A and 2A will have 48-team classifications. The remaining schools will play in 1A.

The second proposal was for all other sports. Other than football, classes 4A, 5A and 6A will have 36 teams in each division. Classes 3A and 2A will have 64 schools each, while the remaining schools will be in 1A.

The football proposal passed with a vote of 215-73 and the all-sports proposal passed with a 207-145 majority. All of the classes, except 6A and 1A, were in favor.

With those new proposals comes a different playoff system for many of the sports.

Louisburg High School, which is a Class 4A school, will see changes in five sports programs – football, basketball, baseball, softball and volleyball.

In football, Louisburg will no longer have district play as the playoffs will begin in week nine. Class 4A will play an eight-game regular season and then each side of the state will be seeded in a bracket from 1 through 16, based on their record.

Given the fact the Frontier League currently has nine teams after recently adding three schools in Tonganoxie, Bonner Springs and Piper, the Wildcats will no longer have to play a non-league opponent. De Soto recently chose to leave the Frontier League following the 2017-18 season to join a new league made up of 5A schools.

“Normally we go out in October to Salina, we would redistrict for 2018 and 2019,” Louisburg activities director Darin Gagnebin said. “I don’t even know that we will have to go cause our league has nine teams, so we would play eight league games and the ninth game gets assigned to you for the playoffs. As of right now in football, we will no longer have any out of conference opponents as long as we maintain nine in the league.”

Another change will be in basketball. For the postseason, there will no longer be substates, instead the 18 teams on each side of the state will be bracketed out by record beginning with two play-in games.

From there, the bracket will be sized down to four-team pods, with the higher seed hosting the game. Teams will have to win two games to reach the state tournaments. Pods will be 1-16-8-9 seeds, 4-13-5-12, 2-15-7-10 and 3-14-6-11. The eight pod winners will advance to the state tournament.

“Depending on where we fall, it could increase travel depending on where we are seeded,” Gagnebin said. “We could have to drive down to Coffeyville or drive up to Atchison, you just don’t know until the end of the year.”

Basketball schedules will also be different with the addition of the new league teams in 2018-19. There will no longer be double round-robin schedules. There will be eight league games, six tournament games and athletic directors will have to find a way to fill the other six.

“We will start in August about building the new league

schedule and it will be tough," Gagnebin said. "One thing you will see is we won't have double round-robin's anymore because we can't play everyone twice. I think there will be traditional rivalries that are held to where we would play those twice due to proximity. Quite frankly, it wouldn't be smart for Louisburg not to play Paola, Ottawa or Spring Hill twice due to higher attendance numbers and proximity. It will probably increase travel costs because you are playing more non-conference opponents."

Baseball and softball will be similar as there will no longer be regionals. Like basketball, there will be two play-in games with the same pod structure. The top four overall seeds will each host all games in their pod on the same day.

In volleyball, there will be four substates across the state, broken into eight brackets. There will also be nine teams in each substate, which will require a play-in game. Teams will need to win two games to qualify for state.

Postseasons for wrestling, track, soccer, cross country and golf will remain the same.

However, even with the new changes, the proposals don't address the competitive balance issue between public and private schools that many members have been talking about for the last several years.

Although he likes the new playoff system, the fact these changes don't address the problem is one of the reasons Gagnebin voted no on the new proposals.

"It was a shock because I didn't think it was going to pass," Gagnebin said. "Other than the playoff system, in my opinion, it doesn't do anything for Class 4A. All the work that went into splitting 4A into two divisions is now gone. I feel bad for those schools because they put in a ton of work. It doesn't really affect us because we are locked into 4A and we are right in the middle of the pack."

“I didn’t see how it benefited Louisburg or 4A, other than the playoffs system where it should ensure you have more competitive teams at state. Since you are seeding them out now, you shouldn’t have a substate of teams with losing records. They could have done that without this.”

Although private schools like Bishop Miege, which have won several state titles in the last few years, could find itself moving up a classification with the new measures, it isn’t a permanent solution according to Gagnebin.

“Enrollment could bump some private schools up a class, but that doesn’t fix the problem,” Gagnebin said. “Private schools can control enrollment. According to (Miege) they are losing enrollment and could be back in 4A. It doesn’t impact the private issue at all and that is why I didn’t vote for it. It is not fixing what the 80 percent of athletic directors polled in Kansas asking what the biggest problems in classifications are. It doesn’t address the real problem.”

Lady Cats set tone for season at team camp



It may not have been the ending it wanted, but the Louisburg High School girls basketball program received the shot in the arm it was looking for.

The Lady Cats improved by seven wins last season off of their three-win campaign in 2015-16, despite the loss to Spring Hill in the first round of sub-state that ended their year.

The season itself created an excitement within the program and Louisburg head coach Shawn Lowry wanted his team to continue to build on that momentum last week when they held their team camp.

Lowry had 36 high school girls participate in the five sessions last week and had 103 campers overall from first through 12th grade.

“We had a very good week of camps at all levels,” Lowry said. “Our seniors did a great job of setting the tone for us with great energy, effort and leadership. The juniors and sophomores were very strong in their work, they competed for everything and are making some big strides in their development. I was impressed with the incoming freshmen group’s work ethic and their willingness to learn and compete.”

Although, the team improved a year ago, the Lady Cats will have a different look to them in 2017-18 as they try to replace the 5-member senior class that all played crucial minutes.

Incoming seniors Isabelle Holtzen, Mikayla Quinn, Haven Trageser-Turner, Lexie Reece and Ryan Caldwell are taking on the leadership role. Although they might not look the same on the court as last year, Lowry knows different players will step up and improve throughout the year.

“Although we graduated a great group of seniors, we have many girls returning that gained some good experience last season,” Lowry said. “As a part of that process, they know what kind of effort they will be asked to give, what kind of teammate they must be and that they have more confidence in themselves and

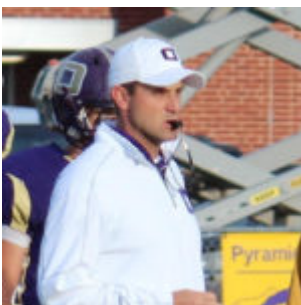
each other.”

Even though the team camp is complete, the work is just beginning for the Lady Cat players and coaches. They will be hitting the weight room three times a week during the summer and will have a chance to participate in open gyms.

“Team camp is primarily about shaping our team’s identity through our work and competition during the week,” Lowry said. “Through the process, the girls learn about each other and they start to build trust in and respect for each other. It’s also about establishing a culture, a mentality with this group to compete and battle for everything.

“The girls understand the importance of their commitment to getting stronger and improving their fundamental skills this offseason.”

Pfannenstiel ready to lead Wildcat boys basketball



Ty Pfannenstiel has been hired to take over the Louisburg High School boys basketball program. Pfannenstiel, who was previously the athletic director, head football coach and head girls basketball coach at Oakley High School, will also serve as Louisburg’s strength coach.

Coming off its first state tournament appearance in 12 years, the Louisburg High School boys basketball team had to find a new leader for the program, following the resignation of former coach Jason Nelson.

The Wildcats came across a good fit during their coaching search.

Louisburg hired Ty Pfannenstiel to take over the Wildcat team for the upcoming season. Pfannenstiel has experience in several different sports. He had different coaching jobs during his time at Oakley and Gardner-Edgerton high schools and is looking forward to working with the Wildcat players.

"I'm extremely excited about taking over the boys program," Pfannenstiel said. "From my days of teaching and coaching at Gardner Edgerton High School, I've always had a lot of respect for Louisburg High School and their sports teams. This is a community that has high expectations, and that is exactly what I was looking for."

Pfannenstiel has been at Oakley High School since 2014 and was the school's athletic director. He was also the head football, head girls basketball and assistant track coach.

He came to Oakley from Gardner-Edgerton, where he taught and coached at the school from 2005 to 2014. During his time with the Blazers, he was an assistant football, boys basketball and baseball coach.

Although Pfannenstiel has his own ideas on what he wants to implement into the Wildcat program, he knows the players are going to have to buy in to the team concept first.

"The two most important things I will expect of my players is commitment and character," Pfannenstiel said. "I want kids in my program that are committed to their teammates and

committed to making themselves a better player. If they make a commitment and work hard...good things will happen.

“And more importantly than that, I want good character kids in my program. I want kids that are going to be the leaders and role models for our school. We plan on winning lots of basketball games at Louisburg, but I’m much more concerned with these kids being successful in their life outside of basketball.”

Pfannenstiel will get a chance to work with his team starting this month, including during the team camp beginning on June 19.

“As for our system, we will try to play an exciting brand of basketball...hard-nosed defense with an up tempo offense,” he said. “I’m excited about getting started with our players this summer and seeing the makeup of our team.”

Along with his job as head boys basketball coach. Pfannenstiel will also be the head strength and conditioning coach for Louisburg High School and he knows that getting better on the court starts in the weight room.

“The weight room is going to be an integral part of developing our program,” he said. “I don’t think there’s any coach out there that wouldn’t want his/her athletes to be as strong and explosive as possible. That will be our goal in the weight room at Louisburg High – develop strong and explosive athletes. I can’t wait to start working with all of the Louisburg athletes in the weight room.”

Harding signs to play basketball at Hesston College



Louisburg High School senior Grant Harding signed his letter of intent on May 2 to play basketball at Hesston College. Sitting next to Grant are his parents Dotty and Ken Harding. Standing (from left) is former Louisburg head coach Jason Nelson, brother and assistant coach Drew Harding and Hesston coach Dustin Galyon.

It has been quite a year for Grant Harding.

The Louisburg High School senior helped the Wildcat basketball team to their first state tournament in 12 years, he led them in scoring and rebounding and was rewarded for those accomplishments with first team all-Frontier League honors.

Now Harding is ready to take the next step in achieving a dream.

On May 2, Harding signed his letter of intent in front of family and friends at LHS to play basketball at Hesston College.

"I am very excited to play basketball at the next level," Harding said. "(Hesston) has been talking to me since December and called me during Christmas break for the first time. They have always seemed like a good option to me and the Hesston program is a very respectable program and a very good team. I

am very excited to finally know where I am going next year.”

Hesston College, which is two-year school located in Hesston, Kan., has had a successful men’s basketball program in recent years, including two years ago when the Larks earned a spot in the junior college national tournament in 2015.

Hesston Coach Dustin Galyon hopes Harding can be one of the pieces that can help get the Larks back on the national stage in the near future.

“I am super excited to have Grant be a part of the Hesston College basketball family,” Galyon said. “We are excited for the role he will play on our team – a team that has been nationally ranked three out of the last five years.

“We think Grant can be an impact guy for us as a freshman and that is saying a lot. There is a great responsibility that comes with that. We think his best basketball is ahead of him. After watching him play, working him out and talking with coach (Jason Nelson), we think he has the chance to be a full-ride kid at the Division II level or higher after he is done with us.”

Playing at a high level has always been a goal for Harding, but he also wanted to get a chance to play right away. Harding feels Hesston helps him in both regards.



Grant Harding, who averaged 17 points a game for the Wildcats, is excited about the opportunity to play at Hesston.

“It is even more exciting to know that after the first two years, I will still have plenty of opportunities to play college ball somewhere – maybe even more than what I had this time around,” Harding said. “Through high school, I have always played three sports, but it is exciting to only play basketball for the next couple years and get better at basketball and staying in basketball shape. It has always been a big adjustment from sport to sport every year.”

Harding, who averaged 17 points and eight rebounds a game for the Wildcats last season, had a few options to play at the college level, but it was Hesston that stood out following his official visit to the school.

“When I went for my visit, I met all the players and they all seemed like great guys,” Harding said. “I had a chance to sit down with all of them and they are all extremely nice. A lot of them are very talented. Coach is a great guy and I know he cares for his players and he has won a lot of games. The whole thing seemed to plan out like I wanted it to do.”

Harding is also ready to take the next step in the academic world as well. While in college, Harding plans to major in secondary education with an emphasis in history.

“Hesston is not just a great fit for him from a basketball perspective, I think it is a great fit off the floor as well,” Galyon said. “He will receive a private education and transfer to anywhere in the country. Hesston is not the typical 2-year school as we have kids from 35 states and 19 countries. He fits the academic piece to that as well and we are a Christian college.

“Grant is going to be challenged on the basketball floor, he is going to be challenged in the classroom, and he is going to be challenged as a young man in his faith. We are seriously excited to have him a part of our program.”

Three schools to join Frontier League



Three schools have accepted invitations, or will soon, to join the Frontier League for the 2018-19 season and beyond.

Piper, Bonner Springs and Tonganoxie will be leaving their current home – the Kaw Valley League – to join the Frontier after all three were offered spots during a meeting in early April.

Their addition will now bring the Frontier League to 10 members, along with Louisburg, Paola, Ottawa, Spring Hill, De Soto, Baldwin and Eudora. The trio of schools made presentations to the current Frontier League members for admittance due to the fact the Kaw Valley is in the process of breaking up. Current member Bishop Ward is leaving the league next school year, which leaves them at six.

Piper quickly accepted the invitation following a vote of its board of education and is looking forward to joining the Frontier.

“We are extremely excited to get into a league with like-size schools and competition levels,” Piper High School activities director Doug Key said. “We believe Piper High School is good fit for the league due to the competition level in all activities and will match up well. We have played all current schools in various activities and felt like this would be a positive move for the future.

“Being in a league with various size schools and us being the smallest wasn’t going to be optimal. We are still are competitive in many areas, but we needed to secure a more balanced future. We feel like being in the middle, size-wise, will keep us competitive for years to come.”

According to this year’s classification numbers, Piper has a current enrollment of 601 students. Turner is the Kaw Valley’s biggest school with 1,114 students, followed by Lansing (910), Bonner Springs (758), Basehor-Linwood (710) and Tonganoxie (618).

Bonner Springs, Piper and Tonganoxie compare to other Frontier League programs. De Soto is the biggest school in the league with 854 students, followed by Ottawa (709), Spring Hill (699), Paola (612), Louisburg (563), Eudora (471) and Baldwin (410).

Bonner Springs' board of education also approved the move to the Frontier League and Bonner Springs High School principal Rick Moulin echoed Key's statement.

"We have competed against teams in the Frontier League the past several years," Moulin said. "The schools in the Frontier League are a lot like Bonner Springs – we are competitive and value sportsmanship. The teams in the Frontier League are similar in size to Bonner Springs, which will be a great gauge for us as we try to compete at the highest level possible in 4A. Bonner Springs is a small town community, with great community support, much like the schools in the Frontier League.

"We are excited to be joining with Piper and Tonganoxie. We hope to continue to be able to compete against Basehor-Linwood, Lansing and Turner. I have a lot of respect for their schools and their programs. Ultimately, the Frontier League was a better fit for our students and our community."

Tonganoxie hasn't officially accepted the invitation, but it is just waiting for its board of education to approve the move during its May 8 meeting. At that point, according to Tonganoxie High School principal Mark Farrar, it will immediately send letter accepting the invite.

"We are very excited to join the Frontier League," Farrar said. "This new partnership will be very good for our students as well as our community. Joining the Frontier League will provide some great opportunities for our students from an athletic and activities standpoint. Tonganoxie mirrors many of the activities that most or all Frontier League schools offer.

We see it as a league that will be a good fit for many years to come.

“One of the things that I think gets overlooked is the idea that a strong league doesn’t just offer opportunities on a playing field, but it also offers a chance for kids to network and make lifelong connections with students from all across the league. The Frontier League is a strong and stable league and we believe that it can advance the overall mission of what we want to do at Tonganoxie.”

Louisburg High School activities director Darin Gagnebin now believes the league is healthier than ever.

“By adding teams to our league, it solidifies our league numbers for years to come ensuring that we, as a league, will remain strong and competitive whether schools decide to leave or stay,” Gagnebin said. “We could have been in a situation in which the Frontier League could have dwindled to four or five schools, but instead we will be stronger at 10 teams, if all teams decided to stay.

That situation came about in March when it was reported by the Tonganoxie Mirror that Kaw Valley League member Lansing wanted to create a larger league that would have contained all or some combinations of Lansing, Blue Valley Southwest, De Soto, Leavenworth, Bonner Springs, Basehor-Linwood, Tonganoxie, Ottawa, Piper, Spring Hill, Turner and Topeka schools Seaman, Shawnee Heights and Topeka West.

A meeting was held between all the schools to look at possibilities of building a stronger league that would rebuild the current Kaw Valley that has Lansing, Turner, Piper, Bonner Springs, Tonganoxie and Basehor-Linwood.

The Frontier League responded with meetings of its own shortly after to discuss each member’s happiness in the league after De Soto, Spring Hill and Ottawa attended the March meeting with Lansing.

De Soto mentioned needing more competition at the sub-varsity level since it has a growing enrollment and looked at the possibility of playing in a league with bigger schools since it has made the jump to Class 5A.

Spring Hill's enrollment also looks to make that jump in three to four years, while Ottawa's enrollment usually hovers around the line between 4A and 5A. Still, all three schools stated during league meetings they were happy in their current position, with De Soto and Spring Hill stating they might need to make a move due to increasing enrollment numbers.

Faced with the possibility of losing at least two members, the Frontier invited Kaw Valley members to make presentations to join the league in order to fill those spots. Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs all made presentations and the Frontier League principals all offered invitations shortly after.

At this point, it appears the league is going to move forward with 10 members as no school has stated their desire to leave the Frontier – however, it doesn't mean it can't happen in the near future.

"I cannot speak for other schools in the Frontier League about their desire to stay or to leave," Gagnebin said. "I know some are considering their options and will do what they believe is in the best interest of their school, and I would support them in whatever they decide. I do believe though whatever they decide, with the addition of these new schools to our league, the Frontier League will remain solid in numbers and will continue to be one of the most competitive leagues in Class 4A.

"I believe the three schools that chose to petition our league for membership will be a great fit for the Frontier League. They offer all sports and activities that are currently offered by the league at all levels. Their enrollments, though

larger than Louisburg, will put them in the middle to upper middle in size within the league.”

The league schedule will also look different beginning with the 2018-19 season, as there will no longer be a double round-robin schedule in certain sports and not every school will play each other in football.

“The biggest challenge will be league scheduling,” Gagnebin said. “Although it will change how we schedule things as a league, most league schools already have some or all of these schools on some of their athletic schedules already. It could increase the amount of non-league games we have to go out and find in some sports, since with 10 teams you can no longer play a double-round-robin schedule as we have currently, due to the amount of games allowed by KSHSAA.

“This is both good and bad, meaning, it could increase travel and some expense, but it allows us greater flexibility in the schedule to play other teams outside the league as well. One negative will be in football. With 10 teams, we will not be able to play every team in the league as we do now. As stated before though, solidifying the league as far as numbers go and increasing the competitiveness of the league are also positives.”

Frontier League shakeup could happen soon



In a few months – or even weeks – the Frontier League as it currently stands could have a different look.

Since March, meetings have gone on within member schools of the Frontier League and Kaw Valley League to discuss possible realignment of both leagues.

The Frontier League currently has seven members – Louisburg, Paola, Spring Hill, De Soto, Ottawa, Baldwin and Eudora – and a meeting between the schools took place on March 28 to discuss where each school stood as far as their happiness in the league.

Brian Biermann, superintendent of USD 416, and Louisburg High School athletic director Darin Gagnebin attended the meeting on Louisburg's behalf and both relayed the fact that every school stated they were happy with the way the league is currently set up, but a couple schools came to the realization the Frontier League might not be able to offer what they are looking for.

De Soto and Spring Hill currently have growing enrollment numbers and are interested in playing Class 5A competition. De Soto moved up to 5A this school year and Spring Hill will look to make the jump in the coming years with its larger enrollment. The rest of the schools all compete in Class 4A.

Both schools stated they would like more competition at the sub-varsity level that schools like Louisburg, Baldwin and Eudora cannot provide. Competing in a mainly 5A league would relieve some of those problems.

“De Soto said they will probably open next year with 950 kids

and they would grow by 100 the year after that,” Biermann said. “They are happy in the Frontier, but they feel like they need 5A competition and they feel like it could hurt them in football with seedings and tie-breakers. They could potentially get penalized by competing in a mainly 4A league.

“Spring Hill wants to be proactive. Their growth is coming. Their classes in the middle school are pretty good size. They won’t grow a lot next year, but they will in the next few years.”

What started the meetings is due to the fact that the Kaw Valley League is looking to rework their situation or create a brand new look altogether. The Kaw Valley currently has seven schools in Lansing, Turner, Bonner Springs, Tonganoxie, Piper, Bishop Ward and Basehor-Linwood, but one member – Bishop Ward – is leaving for a new league beginning next school year.

According to report in March from the *Tonganoxie Mirror*, Lansing wants to create a larger league that would contain all or some combinations of Lansing, Blue Valley Southwest, De Soto, Leavenworth, Bonner Springs, Basehor-Linwood, Tonganoxie, Ottawa, Piper, Spring Hill, Turner and Topeka schools Seaman, Shawnee Heights and Topeka West.

Many of those schools are either in Class 5A already or are close based on enrollment numbers. The idea of competing against bigger competition is intriguing to De Soto, Spring Hill – and possibly Ottawa – the three largest schools in the Frontier League.

An idea was thrown around of creating a league of two divisions between the Kaw Valley and Frontier. One division would be 5A schools and the other would be 4A.

“We visited with our board of education and we are not in favor of a mega-league,” Biermann said. “That has been talked about – having a league of 5A and 4A schools. We don’t want to invite new 5A schools. We are ok with Spring Hill and De Soto

staying in the league, even though they are growing, but we don't want to invite other 5A schools or have a mega league so they can have better competition.

"Our stance is if De Soto and Spring Hill feel like they need 5A competition and leave, then they can work towards that and we can work on filling those spots with 4A schools."

Both Biermann and Gagnebin feel like the Frontier League needs to be proactive as changes could be made sooner rather than later.

"We aren't panicking as a league as much as the Kaw Valley schools are because they know they are headed for a break up," Gagnebin said. "We could easily stay with the seven schools we have. Pretty soon, De Soto will have close to 1,000 kids. It is more on them if they want to be in our league, and if they are happy, by all means stay. We are not saying they have to leave, but they have to do best what is for their school, and if this league isn't the best option for you, then you have to look elsewhere."

Due to the fact De Soto and Spring Hill could be moving on, the Frontier is being proactive and inviting some members of the Kaw Valley League to come make presentations at a meeting Wednesday to see if they would be a fit in the Frontier.

According to Biermann, Tonganoxie, Piper, Bonner Springs and Basehor-Linwood High Schools will all make presentations at the meeting and then schools from both the Kaw Valley and the Frontier will meet to discuss options at a later date.

"I led the (March 28) meeting and I wanted to make sure everyone was as honest and open as possible," Biermann said. "There were no hurt feelings. Collectively we don't want a mega-league, no additional 5A schools and that is firm from us, Paola, Baldwin and Eudora. Spring Hill and De Soto left the meeting, I think, that they need to start looking for potential 5A competition."

“The easy fix would be for De Soto and Spring Hill to join the bigger league and we take someone like Tonganoxie and Piper to replace them. Every school said they loved the Frontier League and competition, but it is time there has to be some conversations. The biggest thing is we don’t have three baseball, softball or soccer teams to schedule, but De Soto and Spring Hill want that. We can’t field C teams in some cases.”

The leagues are on a sort of a time crunch. With football reclassifications and scheduling beginning this October for the next two years, it would be the best case scenario to get the reshuffling done before then so they can schedule for the 2018-19 season and beyond according to Gagnebin.

The Louisburg activities director also believes keeping the right number of teams is also imperative for a healthy league.

“We want to maintain the integrity of our league, whether that is with seven or even eight schools,” Gagnebin said. “We want to maintain that number. Nine is a scheduling nightmare, and if you only have six teams, you are opening up a can of worms where if you leave an open spot, then the state could come in and assign certain schools to us that aren’t a good fit.

“I don’t necessarily want them to leave the league, but we need to be told if they are. I am more afraid of them leaving our league than them staying in our league. I am not afraid of the competition we face with them. We can compete with them in all the sports, but I am more afraid of us dropping from a seven to a five-team league.”

However, one hiccup remains. The Frontier League bylaws state that a member school must give two years notice before leaving the league.

“If the dominoes start falling fast, the league could pass a bylaw amendment to allow for movement for De Soto or whoever, which is something I think they will have to do,” Gagnebin

said. "Not much is happening now, but when it does it is going to happen quick. You better be ready to move with it and have a plan in place or you could be stuck on the outside."

Nelson resigns as head boys basketball coach



Jason Nelson spent the last four years as the Louisburg High School boys basketball head coach, but after leading the Wildcats to their first state tournament since 2005, Nelson resigned from the position last week.

Jason Nelson walked off the state tournament floor in Salina a month ago following a loss to Bishop Miege.

He had just taken the Louisburg boys basketball team to their first state tournament since 2005 and wrapped up his best season as the Louisburg head coach. It was a good year for him and his Wildcat group.

Despite the success, Nelson won't be on the sideline next season as he resigned his post as the Wildcat head coach last week, citing family reasons. Although Nelson considers his team a family of sorts, it is his family at home that needs more of his attention.

"It is never easy to step away on your own accord," Nelson said. "I was joking with some people that it would have been easier had I been fired. My rationale for stepping aside is my kids and family – nothing more and nothing less. My sons are both super active in different sports and Michelle and I assume it's only going to get worse (with regard to their schedule) as they get older.

"As wonderful as my basketball boys and building administration are, the well-being of Micah, Jonah and my family is paramount. It has been one of the most difficult decisions I've had to make. I love the coaching job and with the support I received from within my building, it really was one of the most memorable aspects of my career."

Nelson was the Wildcat head coach for four years and was previously an assistant for one year. Although Nelson created several memories during the run to the state tournament this season, it is his senior classes that have left a lasting impression on him.

"State was obviously a great memory for me and the program," Nelson said. "I will never forget that. But my favorite memories are every senior night I have been a part of. You've got kids who've worked their tails off for four years and they get one chance for the game to be about them – not the league, not the substate, not the crowd, but them. Every single senior I've had the honor to coach has left their mark on our program and been responsible for where we've gotten during my tenure.

"When I took the job, my building administration gave me their goals for the program. We hit them and were working on our own, and while we weren't finished writing our own book, life happens. That's the real testament to the players in our program. They've never been about their own stats or objectives. They've always held the fact that they represent their school and community close and it manifested itself in the constant, tangible improvement we've experienced."

Nelson created a special bond with his players, one that allowed him to bring his two boys – Micah and Jonah – around the team. He has watched the players interact with his kids and it created a family atmosphere around the program.

“Micah is 7 and Jonah is 4,” Nelson said. “My kids are better people for having been around the LHS basketball team and I don’t think that’s the norm for all. I took the job when Jonah was just born and so much of who he is at this point is because of the quality of our boys. It sounds selfish, but what I’ll miss the most is how the players loved my boys. I have countless instances of this and many of them are my most treasured memories.

“My kids not withstanding, I’ll truly miss the competitive nature of the game. I’ve always loved competition and basketball is the most team oriented, competitive sport there is. It’s fast, never goes as anticipated and while personnel is as always paramount, basketball is the one sport that teamwork usually overcomes individual successes. Basketball is the apex of team sports and I’ll miss the hell out of the pregame, in game and postgame coaching.”

Three Wildcats named to all-state basketball team



Senior Madisen Simpson was one of three Louisburg basketball players to receive all-state honors last week. Simpson averaged 17 points a game for the Lady Cats.

Three Louisburg High School basketball players earned all-state honors from two major Kansas newspapers.

Senior Madisen Simpson was named to the Class 4A-Division I third team by the Topeka Capital-Journal and was also selected as an honorable mention by the Wichita Eagle. Sophomore teammate Carson Buffington was also named to the honorable mention team by the Capital-Journal.

Grant Harding, a senior on the boys' basketball team, was selected to the Class 4A-Division I honorable mention team by both the Capital-Journal and Wichita Eagle.

Simpson, who served as the Lady Cats' point guard, was the team's leading scorer with nearly 17 points a game and knocked down 55 3-pointers on the season. She also was 83 percent from the free-throw line and made 25 in a row at one point during the season. She also knocked down six 3-pointers in a game.



Carson Buffington was named to the Class 4A-Division I team by the Topeka Capital-Journal.

As for Buffington, she averaged a team-high 11 rebounds a game, including five offensive rebounds a contest. She had several big rebounding nights for the Lady Cats, including a 22-rebound performance early in the season and also had 17 rebounds in their sub-state game against Spring Hill.

Buffington also averaged six points and two steals a game as she was one of the team's starting forwards. She the Frontier League in rebounding for the second consecutive season and finished in the top 10 in the state in rebounds.

Earlier in the month, Simpson was named to the all-Frontier League first team, while Buffington was named an honorable mention.



Louisburg senior Grant Harding was named to the Class 4A-Division I honorable mention team last week.

Harding led the Wildcats to their first state tournament since 2005 and was the team's leading scorer. He averaged close to a double-double with 17 points and eight rebounds a contest.

He was also selected to the all-Frontier League first team earlier this month and Harding earned all-league honors in three of his four years with the program.