

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 Miego, 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 (Miego) 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."

Juarez signs to play soccer at JCCC



Louisburg High School senior Noah Juarez signed his letter on May 16 to play soccer at Johnson County Community College. Sitting next Noah are his parents Susan and Tony Juarez. Standing (from left) is Louisburg High School coach Kyle Conley and Director of Kansas Rush Daouda Kante.

Soccer has always been a big part of Noah Juarez's life.

He has been a four-year starter for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team and recently helped the Wildcats to their first state semifinal appearance last season. He accomplished a lot during his four years as a Wildcat, but now he is ready to see what he can do as a Cavalier.

Juarez signed his letter of intent on May 16 to play soccer at Johnson County Community College this fall and officially

ended a difficult recruiting process for the Wildcat senior. At the same time, he is excited for what the future holds.

“The other options were private and smaller schools,” Juarez said. “At Johnson County, I knew people that were going there and had (club) teammates that were playing there and I know the coaches well. All the little things kind of added up and I thought it would be smart to go there.”

Juarez was a big part of the Wildcat soccer program the last four seasons. Not only has he started since he was a freshman, he earned all-Frontier League and all-state honors all four years.



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez finished his senior season with 18 goals to lead the Wildcats. Juarez now prepares to continue his career at Johnson County Community College.

This past season, Juarez led the Wildcats with 18 goals and had seven assists as he was one of several players to lead Louisburg to a fourth-place finish at state – the best in program history.

For Johnson County, Juarez will still play in the midfield like he did for the Wildcats, however instead of playing the attacking position, he will slide back a little bit to play as a center or defensive midfielder.

“I am excited that I will have a good coaching staff that will put me in the right direction and help me in the best ways they can and I am looking forward to where I will end up next,” Juarez said. “I plan to play quite a bit, but nothing is set in stone. I am just looking forward to competing and making a big impact there.”

Juarez will join a Cavalier team that finished with an 11-5-1 record last season and finished first in the Jayhawk Conference with just one loss. The Cavaliers also earned a No. 1 seed in the Region VI playoffs.

“When they finished first (in conference) last season, that definitely sparked my attention a lot more,” Juarez said. “They have a great coaching staff and I know them from coaching my club team. Everything I have heard is just great and I am excited.”

Playing at a big college has always been a goal for Juarez, so he hopes to use Johnson County as a stepping stone to a bigger program in the future.

“It definitely means a lot.” Juarez said of playing in college. “Knowing that my father played at a high level in college, really made me want to do the same. Having the ability to do that in a smart way, and having the opportunity to go farther once I graduate from Johnson County is definitely something I am excited about.”

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 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.”

Knipp signs with Ottawa University-Arizona for soccer



Louisburg High School senior Herman Knipp signed his letter of intent on March 10 to play soccer for Ottawa University-Arizona, a new school that is opening in Surprise, Ariz. Sitting next to him are his parents Herman and Susan Knipp. Standing (from left) is Louisburg soccer assistant Michael Pickman and head coach Kyle Conley.

Once his high school season ended in early November, Herman Knipp thought he was done with soccer.

The Louisburg High School senior was ready to focus on getting a degree in engineering, but then he got a message from an old club coach and everything changed. He presented Knipp with an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

His former U12 coach, Matt Gow, was recently named as the head coach for Ottawa University-Arizona, a brand new college based in Surprise, Ariz. Gow offered him a spot and Knipp accepted a chance to play for his former coach.

Knipp made it official on March 10 when he signed his letter of intent to play for Ottawa and he is ready for a chance to make his mark with a new program.

"It is incredible," Knipp said. "You don't really get the chance to start something at the collegiate level. A chance like that just doesn't come because all these programs and colleges have been established for so long. I am excited about it. Obviously it is going to be a little rough the first couple of years because we are starting from scratch, but I am looking forward to it."

The new campus will be located across the street from where the Kansas City Royals have spring training and the Ottawa school will feature 19 athletic teams as it looks to grow in the coming years.



Knipp is excited to be a part of it and earn his engineering degree at the same time.

“Ottawa changed the schedule around to make it easier on the athletes,” Knipp said. “I found a way to make athletics and academics combine into one and just having the opportunity to play in college and it is not one many people get. I can’t take this for granted and can’t wait to move to Arizona.”

Being a part of a first-year program intrigued Knipp, and despite being a long way from home, he is looking forward to joining the Spirit team. The coaches have mentioned to Knipp about possibly playing the forward position – the same one he played in high school – or he could play in the midfield.

Knipp earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors in

his senior season after he scored 10 goals and recorded three assists as he helped the Wildcats to a fourth-place state finish in Class 4-1A – the best finish in school history.

“He has every one on a blank slate because we are all technically freshman to him. Honestly, I want to start if that is possible, but I am just going to give everything I have and do my best when I get down there. Everyone is fighting for those 11 spots.”

Along with trying to find his way with a new team and school, Knipp will have to adjust to a new community – one that is several hours away from home.

“It is going to be tough,” Knipp said. “I can’t be like, ‘Hey mom, can I come home for dinner tonight?’ It is an 18-hour drive straight-through. It will be a major life change that is for sure, but I am excited for it.”

Top 10 stories of 2016



Here are the Louisburg Sports Zone Top 10 Stories of the Year. In each brief explanation of the story, there will be a link to the full story of when the event actually happened. Thanks again for a successful 2016 and I am already looking forward to 2017.

10. LHS golf qualifies three for the state tournament



Hogan Welch (left), Ty Martin (middle) and T.J. Svoboda all earned a spot in the Class 4A state golf tournament in May.

Three Louisburg High School golfers put together a strong performance in less-than-ideal weather conditions during the Class 4A regional tournament in May.

Hogan Welch, T.J. Svoboda and Ty Martin all three earned qualifying scores to earn a spot in the Class 4A state tournament in the rain at Dub's Dread Golf Course. At the state tournament, Welch led the way as he shot an 84 to finish 34th overall in his second consecutive state tournament.

9. Tappan, Conklin win state debate crown



Carson Tappan (left) and Curran Conklin (right) pose for a picture with their state championship debate trophy with coach Brian Weilert.

After 11 rounds and 17 hours of debate over two days, Carson Tappan and Curran Conklin didn't have a lot more left to give.

But all that hard work paid off for the Louisburg High School duo.

During the Class 4A 2-speaker state debate tournament at Independence High School, Tappan and Conklin were awarded their first state championship after finishing with an 11-0 record.

They weren't the only Louisburg team to come home with some hardware.

Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson found

themselves among the final four teams as well. Despite a close split-decision loss in the semifinals, Holtzen and Anderson finished third to win their first state trophy.

8. Three Wildcats win regional track titles, qualify 11 events for state



Chloe Renner (left), T.J. Dover (middle) and Isabelle Holtzen won regional titles in their respective events in May at the regional meet in Chanute.

Louisburg High School students Isabelle Holtzen, Chloe Renner and T.J. Dover were among several members of the Wildcat track teams to have big performances at the Class 4A regional meet in May at Chanute High School.

Holtzen won a regional crown in the pole vault, while Renner won the triple jump to lead the Lady Cats as they qualified for six events total. Louisburg sent all three relay teams that consisted of Kaitlyn Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Megan Lemke, Reilly Alexander, Jordon Leach, Hanna Becker, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham, Liz Hildreth and Holtzen. Sophie McMullen also earned a spot in the discus.

Dover captured a regional crown in the discus as he recorded a personal best throw of more than 150 feet. He was one of five

events to go to the state meet. Teammate Jarod Woodward also qualified in the shot put, while Chris Williams did the same in the 400 dash.

Brandon Cooper, Quinn Rigney, Ben Minster, along with Williams, helped the 4×100 relay team earn a spot, while Wyatt Reece, Ben Hupp, Tanner Belcher and Michael Minster also qualified in the 4×800 relay.

7. FFA wins three state titles, shines at national competition



Members of the LHS FFA chapter won three state titles in May and later traveled to nationals in October and brought home several honors.

After three Louisburg High School FFA teams won state titles in their respective career development events in May at the state competition, those same students performed well at the nationals.

Louisburg sent three teams to the 89th Annual National FFA

Convention in Indianapolis and all three were among the top in their respective Career Development Events (CDE). Each team received a gold emblem, while 11 of the 12 members who attended received individual gold emblems as well.

Paige Buffington, Wyatt Reece, Georgia Wilde, Justin Sievert, Hattie Harris, Hallie Hutsell, Faith Seuferling, Mariah Wrigley, Madelynn Yalowitz, Bryn O'Meara, Morgan Strumillo and Lexie Reece all came away with honors from nationals.

6. Cross country sends three to state, Moore captures medal



Freshman Trinity Moore became the first female runner in Louisburg history to capture a state cross country medal.

Louisburg High School freshman Trinity Moore didn't look like a first-year varsity runner at the Class 4A state cross country meet as she finished 19th overall with a time of 20 minutes and 54 seconds – just 10 seconds off her personal best time. That finish was good enough to earn a state medal and became the first female runner in Louisburg history to do so.

Moore joined juniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith as all three runners competed in the state meet in Wamego in October. Reece and Smith finished 48th and 68th, respectively, just a week after finishing in the top five at the regional meet.

5. Koechner, Keegan earn medals as Wildcat wrestling puts five to state



Louisburg's Mason Koechner was one of two medalists for the Wildcats at the Class 4A state wrestling tournament in February. Koechner finished third at 220 pounds and teammate Nathan Keegan was sixth at 120 pounds.

For the first time since 2011, a member of the Louisburg High School wrestling team left the Class 4A state tournament with a medal – in fact – two of them did.

Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan finished in the top six of their respective weight classes at state meet in Salina. Koechner took third overall at 220 pounds, while Keegan came in sixth at 120 pounds.

Along with the two state medalists, the Wildcats also sent three other wrestlers to state. Anders Vance (285 pounds), Thad Hendrix (113) and Hunter Bindi (106) competed for

Louisburg as it qualified five for state for the second consecutive season.

4. Griffin signs with New Orleans Saints



Photo courtesy of the New Orleans Saints
Louisburg native, and Air Force Academy graduate, Garrett Griffin, was signed to the New Orleans Saints practice squad

in August.

In early June, Garrett Griffin received his diploma from the Air Force Academy and shook hands with the President of the United States.

That event alone is enough to top most people's list of accomplishments. Four days later, Griffin fulfilled a life-long dream.

Following his graduation from the Air Force, Griffin was signed by the New Orleans Saints and his dream of playing professional football became a reality. The Louisburg native competed in the Saints training camp and later earned a spot on the team's practice squad, where he currently resides.

3. Wildcat football rallies around coach, ends playoff drought



The Louisburg High School football team celebrates its

regional championship and its first playoff win in four years.

The season didn't get off to the start members of the Louisburg High School football team were hoping for. The Wildcats dealt with the departure of head coach Kyle Littrell before the season, but instead of letting it define their season, it made them stronger.

Louisburg rallied behind its former coach and the Wildcats won their first playoff game in four years after they defeated Independence in November to win a regional title. The Wildcats lost to eventual state champion Bishop Miege in the sectional round of the playoffs and ended their season with an 8-3 record.

2. Girls soccer team wins regional crown during inaugural season



The Louisburg girls soccer team celebrates its regional championship in the Wildcats' inaugural season.

As the final buzzer sounded, members of the Louisburg girls soccer team rushed to each other in the middle of the field at the Wildcat Sports Complex. It was a sense of euphoria.

The Wildcats had every reason to be excited.

Louisburg – a program that has been in existence for all of two months – won its first regional title in program history in May after it ousted Basehor-Linwood in a 3-1 victory during the regional championship game. The win put the Wildcats in the state quarterfinals, where their season came to an end with 3-1 loss to De Soto and finished up with a 14-4-1 record on season.

1. Boys soccer advances to state final four



The Louisburg High School boys soccer team made history this past season as the Wildcats earned their first state quarterfinal victory and a spot in the Class 4A final four.

The state quarterfinal round had been nothing but heartbreak for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

In their previous six appearances, the Wildcats have seen their season come to an end and those players were left only to dream what playing in the state final four would be like.

There was no imagining this time around.

Louisburg got a goal in the 75th minute from senior Herman Knipp to give the Wildcats a 1-0 victory over Trinity Academy

in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg. The Wildcats moved on to the Class 4A state final four in Topeka in November, where they took fourth – the best finish in program history.

The Wildcats (14-6-2) finished their season with losses to eventual state champion Bishop Miege and Andover Central, but doubled their number of wins from the prior year.

Six Wildcats named to all-state soccer team



Louisburg senior defender Jacob Benne (left) and senior midfielder Noah Juarez were named to the Class 4-A all-state first team by the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association last week. In all, the Wildcats put six players on the team.

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team is coming off possibly the best season in program history and the awards continue to stream in for several Wildcats

Six Louisburg players were selected to the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association Class 4-1A all-state team last week, including two first-team selections, three second-team honors and an honorable mention.

Senior midfielder Noah Juarez and senior defender Jacob Benne were selected to the first team as both players led the Wildcats in their respective positions. Junior midfielder Grant Ryals, senior defender Curran Conklin and junior defender Kris Light earned second-team honors, while junior goalie Ambrose Stefan was named as an honorable mention.

"This was fantastic to see so many of the boys receive this honor," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "I could not be more pleased for them. This is an incredible honor and the boys earned it. None of these accolades could not be possible without their teammates. This was just the icing on the cake for these young men. It was an incredible season and one that will be difficult to duplicate."



(From left) Junior Grant Ryals, senior Curran Conklin and junior Kris Light were named to the Class 4-1A all-state second team and junior goalie Ambrose Stefan earned honorable mention honors.

Juarez was among the top scorers in the Frontier League as he finished the season with 18 goals and seven assists to lead the Wildcats. Benne, along with Conklin, was key to the Wildcat defense from outside back spot as both players kept opposing offenses from getting good looks at the goal.

Ryals played a defensive midfielder spot for the Wildcats, but still finished the season with five goals and had four assists. Light was also a big part of the Louisburg defense as

he helped turn away shots from the middle of the field.

Stefan kept the Wildcats in several games as he finished the year with 62 saves and had nine shutouts in 21 games. He gave up an average of 1.09 goals a game as he helped the Wildcats to a 14-6-1 record on the season.

These are just the latest honors for the Wildcats. Last month, Louisburg earned eight all-Frontier League selections, which was the most of any league school.

The Wildcats ended their season in the Class 4-1A state tournament for the first time in program history and finished fourth overall.

Eight Wildcats selected to all-league soccer team



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez (left) and junior Grant Ryals were both named to the all-Frontier League first team recently as they were two of eight Wildcats selected to the squad when the list was released last week.

Fresh off a run to its first state semifinal appearance in program history, the Louisburg High School boys soccer team is

starting to reap rewards from what was a successful season.

The Wildcats finished near the top of the Frontier League standings this year after winning only four games in the regular season a year ago. That turnaround caught the eye of the rest of their opponents and the league coaches rewarded them for it.

Louisburg earned eight spots on the all-Frontier League team that was released last week following the Wildcats' run in the state tournament that left them with a fourth place finish in Class 4-1A.

The Wildcats had the most all-league selections in the Frontier League and league champion Spring Hill was second with seven.

Midfielders Noah Juarez and Grant Ryals garnered first team honors, while defenders Jacob Benne, Kristopher Light and goalie Ambrose Stefan were named to the second team. Forward Herman Knipp, midfielder Landon Johnson and defender Curran Conklin were selected as honorable mentions.

"It was extremely gratifying to see this," Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. "This was kind of icing on the cake for the boys. They all worked so hard and to be acknowledged by the other league coaches was impressive. The boys did a lot of great things this year and it was really nice to get the credit they so deserved."

Juarez was one of the top scorers in the Frontier League as he finished the season with 18 goals and seven assists and filled up the stat sheet on a lot nights. Ryals was the opposite of Juarez as he had five goals and four assists on the season, but was invaluable to what the Wildcats were trying to accomplish.

"Noah had his best season statistically in his career," Conley said. "He fit the system I put in place perfectly and he

excelled at attacking midfielder. He has had a great attitude and was a leader for us this year.

“Grant played defensive midfielder for us and did a lot of the ugly jobs. At defensive midfielder your stats aren’t always going to stand out, but he did the dirty jobs. He had a great work ethic and provided a lot of structure for our team. He was also one who did a great job starting our possession.”



Junior Kristopher Light (left), junior Ambrose Stefan (center) and senior Jacob Benne were named to the all-league second team.

Louisburg’s defense was a big part of the Wildcats’ success this season and many of them were rewarded for their efforts. Benne and Conklin turned away several opportunities from the outside back spot, while Light cleaned up the middle of the field. In goal, Stefan provided the Wildcats with many big saves on the season.

“It was great to see the progress that Jacob, Curran, Ambrose and Kris made this year and their focus to improve,” Conley said. “I was extremely pleased with how much they improved and the leadership they provided to our team. They had great and positive attitudes and were a major asset to our success. The defense did a great job holding our team together and keeping us in the game. They exceeded our expectations and were

excellent in the back for us. It was really nice that the league took notice.”



Senior Curran Conklin (left), freshman Landon Johnson (center) and senior Herman Knipp were named as all-league honorable mentions.

Knipp, a senior, was second on the Wildcat team with 10 goals to go along with three assists on the year from the forward position to earn the honorable mention honor. As a freshman, Johnson also made a big impression on the coaches with four goals and two assists at the midfield spot.

Knipp scored the game's lone goal in the Wildcats' 1-0 state quarterfinal win over Trinity Academy, while Johnson also had a goal that tied eventual league champion Spring Hill late in the regular season.

“With as talented as our league is offensively, it was fantastic to see them acknowledge Herman and Landon,” Conley said. “They both had really good years and scored some big goals for us. I think Herman's goal could be the most important goal in the history of our program. Landon's goal against Spring Hill could also be one of the top five of our program's history as well. Both kids were talented and excelled in their own ways.

“I could not be happier for this group. These individual awards could not be possible without their teammates. I feel that our team finishing fourth in state just proves this. It was a fantastic season and I could not be happier for a group of young men.”

ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE SOCCER

FIRST TEAM

Noah Juarez, Louisburg, senior

Lucas Moore, Spring Hill, senior

Keegan Finch, Ottawa, senior

Ethan Rodriguez, De Soto, junior

Grant Ryals, Louisburg, junior

Daniel Hidalgo, Spring Hill, senior

Lorenzo Noguiera, Spring Hill, senior

Andrew Dowdy, De Soto, senior

Carson Brier, De Soto, sophomore

Blayne Chapman, Baldwin, junior

GOALIE – Killian Beck, Spring Hill, senior

SECOND TEAM

Ellis Baughan, Baldwin, senior

Sam Campbell, Eudora, senior

Daniel Apple, De Soto, sophomore

Andrew Soph, Ottawa, senior

Ryan Wokutch, Paola, freshman

Jacob Benne, Louisburg, senior

Bryce Towles, Spring Hill, junior

Kristopher Light, Louisburg, junior

Keenan Powell, Spring Hill, senior

Noah Buckley, Baldwin, senior

GOALIE – Ambrose Stefan, Louisburg, junior

HONORABLE MENTION

Caleb Othick, Spring Hill, senior

Curran Conklin, Louisburg, senior

Jon Bock, Eudora, junior

Dylan Jamison, Baldwin, sophomore

Andrew Goodman, De Soto, junior

Zane Muhl, Ottawa, senior

Herman Knipp, Louisburg, senior

Byron Fangman, Ottawa, senior

Landon Johnson, Louisburg, freshman

GOALIE – Bret Folks, Eudora, senior

Wildcats finish fourth at state tournament



Louisburg senior Noah Juarez (10) jumps into the air to win a header Saturday during the third-place game of the Kansas Class 4-1A State Soccer Championships at Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

TOPEKA – It had already made program history, but the Louisburg High School boys soccer team wanted more – much more.

The Wildcats had their eyes set on a state championship last weekend after they qualified for the Kansas Class 4-1A State Soccer Championships for the first time. At the very least, Louisburg wanted to finish in the top three and bring home a trophy to be displayed in the school for years to come.

Those hopes were dashed as Louisburg suffered a pair of losses, including a 5-0 defeat Friday in the semifinals to the eventual state champion, Bishop Miege. A little more than 12 hours later, Louisburg faced off with Andover Central in the third place match, but came up short in a 2-0 loss Saturday at the Hummer Sports Park in Topeka.

Louisburg (14-6-2) may have seen its season end with two losses, but the Wildcats made a big jump from the previous season as it won twice as many games as the year before and captured its first-ever state quarterfinal victory.

“Coming off the season they came off of, we knew that we were going to have a lot of work to do.,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We knew for any of this to happen, it would just be unbelievable and would be the greatest thing ever. Now that our expectations are so high, we are super disappointed because we didn’t play well. It is so frustrating because the boys did so well and came so far. It stinks, but at the same time when you look back it is an unbelievable journey and unbelievable ride. It is a fantastic experience with a great group of young men.”

The Wildcats were hoping to salvage the state tournament with a win over Andover Central for third place, but Louisburg was forced to play from behind for almost the entire match.

Andover Central’s Jacob Meeker put the Jaguars on top less than two minutes into the match and Andover’s Jayden Vossen added another goal with 20 minutes left in the first half.

“We were just trying to get settled,” Conley said of the first goal. “We gave up maybe two goals like that all year and one of the best players in the state gets a great run and we can’t get a body on him. Then for the rest of the game I think we were on our heels. It is unfortunate. I was just thinking if we could weather the storm for the first 10 minutes, get our feet under us because we are all fired up, but two minutes and then boom.



Defender Jacob Benne clears the ball away near the goal Saturday.

Louisburg did have its chances, especially in the first half, as senior Jacob Benne ripped a shot off a deflected corner kick from 25 yards away that was saved.

Seniors Noah Juarez, Herman Knipp, along with juniors Scott Murphy, Raistlin Brewer and Grant Ryals, all had opportunities, but their shots were either just wide or found the hands of the Andover goalie.

The opportunities were not quite as prevalent in the second half as the Andover defense kept a lot of people back and limited the Wildcats' shots on goal.

"Andover Central is a team that bunkers in and once they get a lead they are going to sit in," Conley said. "We kept getting

chance after chance, we just could not get one to go in. If we would have, we would've instantly had the momentum because just needed that one little jolt. That would have got the crowd going and they would have felt that energy a little bit. Unfortunately, their keeper made some big saves and it is what it is. It is disappointing, but it has been a great run and we should be holding our heads up."



Senior Ty Martin tries to dribble past an Andover Central defender Saturday during the third-place game in Topeka.

Bishop Miega also scored quickly on the Wildcats as it scored a goal in the opening minutes of the semifinal game and dominated possession. Louisburg was able to keep it a one score game for much of the first half, but the Stags scored right before halftime to make it a 2-0 deficit for the

Wildcats.

The Stags scored three more goals in the second half, including one on a penalty kick. Miede went on to play for the state championship and beat Basehor-Linwood 1-0 in overtime.

In the first half we gave up a quick goal again and it was just nerves playing in this atmosphere," Conley said. "Miede came at us hard and we were extremely nervous. We gave up a soft goal right before half and we were on our heels a little bit. It was good experience for everyone because we were able to get a lot of kids in so everyone got to get in the game and play against the eventual state champion."

Despite the two losses, the Wildcats realize it was a good season that brought several good memories. Still it was bittersweet for Wildcat seniors Noah Juarez, Jacob Benne, Ty Martin, Calvin Cassida, Curran Conklin, Kolten Ragan and Herman Knipp as they played their final game in a Louisburg uniform.

"These boys had an up and down career," Conley said. "They have faced a lot of adversity, but they turned it around at the end of last year and had a great run. They won a regional championship and lost to the eventual state champion in Rose Hill and it was a fantastic shot of confidence for them because then they could believe in themselves. Then I tried to get them to buy into a system and believe in what I can see out of them and what they can do, and then see them become that was unbelievable. Then to beat a team like Trinity to get here in the first place was phenomenal and doing it at home in front of a ridiculous amount of people."

"Beating Tonganoxie, De Soto, tying Spring Hill, sweeping Ottawa, going to state – things this program hasn't done in a long time has been a lot of fun. It is a credit to their work ethic and how hard their devotion, belief and love for one another just emulated in a great journey for us."