2018 Male Athlete of the Year Nominees



For the past two years, Louisburg Sports Zone has given out Athlete of the Week awards during each of the three sports seasons. I do it to recognize special athletic achievements and highlight them a little bit. So this year, I wanted to take it a step further.

This year Louisburg Sports Zone will be handing out an Athlete of the Year honor to a male and female athlete at Louisburg High School. I wanted the opportunity to recognize those who exemplify what it means to be an “athlete.”

Although I am giving out the award, I wanted the process to subjective, so I asked the head coaches at LHS to help me out. I asked each coach to send me nominations of who they thought exemplified the Athlete of the Year honor. They will then vote for their top 3 male and female and then I will tabulate the results and determine the winner. In the next couple of weeks, I will announce this year recipient.

Below are the male nominees for this year’s award in alphabetical order by last name. Congrats to all those who were nominated and best of luck!

2018 LOUISBURG SPORTS ZONE

MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR NOMINEES



Blue Caplinger – Junior – Football, Wrestling, Track and Field

Caplinger played a big role for the Wildcat football team as he shared quarterback duties to start the year and then moved over to the tight end spot, but his biggest impact came on defense where he earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors. He finished the season with 32 tackles and two interceptions from his secondary spot.

On the wrestling mat, Caplinger was a state qualifier for the Wildcats at 160 pounds and finished his season with a 34-14 record. He won titles at two different tournaments and holds the team record with most career reversals with 71.

Caplinger also fared well on the track where he ran sprints and relays for Louisburg. Caplinger was a member of the 4×400-meter relay team that finished seventh in the state in Class 4A, and also ran on the 4×100-meter relay team that qualified for the Kansas Relays.



Cade Holtzen – Freshman – Cross Country, Wrestling, Track and Field

Holtzen thrived on the wrestling mat this past season as he earned the Wildcats' lone state medal. He finished sixth overall at 113 pounds and became the second freshman in school history to place at state with a 45-6 record.

He also broke two team records in the process. Holtzen currently holds the mark for most wins in a season (45), most nearfall-2 (23). He also led the Wildcats in five other

statistical categories.

Holtzen was a Frontier League and regional runner-up and won tournament titles at four different competitions.

He also ran on the Louisburg varsity cross country team and ran distance races for the Wildcat track team.



Austin Moore – junior – football, wrestling, track and field

On the football team, Moore was named a team captain and had success on both sides of the ball. As a running back, he recorded 1,215 yards and 15 touchdowns. Defensively, he tallied more than 70 tackles from the linebacker spot.

Moore was named to the all-Frontier League first team on both

sides of the ball and was an honorable mention all-state selection by the Topeka-Capital Journal and Wichita Eagle. He was also named an all-state, all-purpose player by K-Preps. Moore was also selected as the team's Offensive Player of the Year and recipient of the BAC Award.

On the wrestling mat, he was also a team captain and recorded a 43-7 record. Moore was a state qualifier at 195 pounds and was a regional runner-up. He won the team's Workhorse Award and set a program record with 38 pins. Moore also had the highest GPA on the team.

Moore threw the javelin for the Wildcat track and field team as recorded a season best throw of 151 feet in the regional meet and finished eighth.



John Wyatt Reece – Senior – Cross Country, Track and Field

Reece became the first state cross country medalist in several years for Louisburg High School. He finished 11th overall at the Class 4A meet in Wamego to earn a medal and also earned all-state honors for his effort.

He also finished runner-up in the Frontier League meet and currently holds the third fastest time in school history. He earned first-team all-league honors. Reece also competed at the CCCNC National Race where he medaled individually and was a part of the second place team.

In track, Reece qualified for state in the 1,600 and 3,200-meter runs and finished ninth at state in the 3,200. He was also a regional runner-up in both events.

Reece was a Kansas Relays qualifier and medalist in the 2,000-meter steeplechase and currently holds the school record.

Reece has signed with Southwest Minnesota State next season and will run for the Mustangs starting next fall.



Madden Rutherford – Sophomore – Football, Basketball, Baseball

Rutherford took over the starting quarterback role as a sophomore for the Wildcat football team and became a dual-threat athlete at that position. He finished with 670 yards through the air and had eight touchdowns. On the ground, he racked up 318 yards and two more touchdowns. His performance helped him to a second-team honor on the all-Frontier League team.

On the baseball diamond, Rutherford was the Wildcats' top pitcher on the season and also did his job out on in the field as he earned second team all-Frontier League honors as an outfielder. Rutherford started six games this season and pitched 28 innings with a 5.12 earned run average and struck

out 23 batters. At the plate, he finished the season with a .408 average, three doubles, a triple, a home run and had 10 RBIs. He also ended the year with only three errors in 19 games.

Rutherford also saw a lot of varsity time for the Wildcat basketball team as he played in 17 games.



Grant Ryals – Senior – Soccer, Golf

Ryals led the Louisburg boys soccer team as he garnered first team all-league and all-state honors this past season. He served as team captain the past two seasons and scored seven goals and had 11 assists from the midfield spot.

His 11 assists put him fourth in the all-time Louisburg single season record and his 23 career assists place him second all-

time.

Ryals will continue his soccer career at William Jewell College next season.

Ryals was also a member of the Louisburg varsity golf team and was a part of several runner-up team finishes with the Wildcats.

2018 Female Athlete of the Year Nominees



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Although I am giving out the award, I wanted the process to subjective, so I asked the head coaches at LHS to help me out.

I asked each coach to send me nominations of who they thought exemplified the Athlete of the Year honor. They will then vote for their top 3 male and female and then I will tabulate the results and determine the winner. In the next couple of weeks, I will announce this year recipient.

Below are the female nominees for this year’s award in alphabetical order by last name. Congrats to all those who were nominated and best of luck!

2018 LOUISBURG SPORTS ZONE

FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR NOMINEES



Bailey Belcher, Senior, Basketball and Girls Soccer

Belcher led the Wildcat girls soccer team to a state runner-up finish this past season as she was among the leading scorers on the team with 28 goals and 14 assists, which included five hat tricks. She is a three-time all-Frontier League and all-state first teamer, and has been a team captain for the last two seasons.

She holds the Louisburg record for most goals in a season with 33 and in a career with 91. She is will continue her soccer career at Missouri Southern next season.

Belcher was also a starter on the Lady Cats' basketball team and earned honorable mention all-league honors after averaging eight points, four rebounds and two steals a game.



Carson Buffington – Junior – Volleyball, Basketball and Girls Soccer

Buffington helped the Louisburg volleyball team to a state runner-up performance in the Class 4A-Division I state tournament as the team's setter. She finished the season with more than 1,100 assists and had 30 aces. She also helped out defensively with 244 digs.

She earned second team all-Frontier League honors and was also placed on the Kansas Volleyball Association's (KVA) all-state second team. Buffington was also selected to the KVA all-state tournament team.

On the basketball court, Buffington earned second team all-Frontier League honors and led the league in rebounding for the third straight season. She averaged 11.6 rebounds a game

to go along with 9.2 points and 2.7 steals from the forward spot.

Buffington also served as the back-up goalie for the Wildcat soccer team and saw action in several varsity games.



Anna Dixon – Junior – Volleyball

Dixon played a big role in the Lady Cats' state runner-up volleyball team this past season. As an all-around player, Dixon led Louisburg with 613 kills and 61 blocks on the season. She was also third on the team with 58 aces and 329 digs.

She earned first team all-Frontier League and all-state honors. Dixon was named as the Kansas Volleyball Association's Class 4A-D1 Co-Player of the Year and was selected to the KVA

all-state tournament team.

Dixon also earned Best of Kansas Preps selection by the Topeka Capital-Journal, which is a new award this season. She has committed to Kansas State University to play volleyball in the fall of 2019.



Carlee Gassman – Sophomore – Cross Country, Basketball, Track and Field

Gassman had a record-breaking season for the Louisburg track team. She broke a 29-year old school record in the 300-meter hurdles in early April and then broke her own school record several more times this season, including at the Class 4A state meet where she ran a time of 45.68 to finish second in the state.

It was her first of two state medals on the season as she also finished fifth in the state in the long jump with a mark of just more than 17 feet. She also won a regional title in the 300-meter hurdles.

Gassman was also a consistent runner on the Wildcat cross country team that qualified for the state meet for the first time in school history. She served as the No. 2 runner for most of the season.

On the basketball court, Gassman saw a lot of varsity time for the Lady Cats as well as one of the team's point guards.



Isabelle Holtzen – Senior – Cross Country, Basketball, Track and Field

Holtzen had a record-breaking season in the pole vault this past season for the Lady Cats' track and field team. She broke her own school in the event with a vault of 11 feet, 6 inches

and went on to finish sixth at the Class 4A state track meet with a clearance of 11-0.

She was also a league and regional runner-up, while also running on legs of the 4×100 and 4×400-meter relay teams.

On the cross country team, Holtzen was a consistent runner on a varsity team that qualified for state for the first time in school history.

On the basketball court, Holtzen served as a team captain and was a full-time starter for the Lady Cats at the guard spot.

At the end of the school year, Holtzen became the first Lady Cat in several decades to earn 12 varsity athletic letters and did so while earning a 4.0 GPA, which is first in her class.



Sophie McMullen – Senior – Volleyball

McMullen was another key piece to the Lady Cats' success this past season on the volleyball court. She made the switch from setter to outside hitter and defensive player to help Louisburg to a state runner-up campaign.

She was first on the team with 114 aces to go along with 437 digs defensively. As an outside hitter, McMullen added 381 kills.

McMullen was selected to the all-Frontier League and all-state first team and was named to the Kansas Volleyball Association all-state tournament team. She was also selected to the Greater Kansas City Coaches Volleyball Association all-star team.

McMullen signed to play volleyball at Northwest Missouri State this coming fall.

OPINION: 2017 was a banner year for Louisburg



Having the opportunity to cover Louisburg High School athletics, for what has been almost 10 years now, I have seen a lot of different highs and lows.

I have been lucky enough to cover state championship teams and

watched several athletes perform at the highest level. However, this last year has to be one for the record books when it comes to success at Louisburg High School.

For Wildcat athletics, 2017 was a banner year for many reasons.

Louisburg qualified for the state tournament in three different sports – volleyball, girls soccer and boys basketball – and the first two each placed in the top four.

The volleyball team was just a point away from winning the school's first state title after the Lady Cats finished second to defending state champion Rose Hill, and tied for the best finish in school history.

The Wildcat girls soccer team qualified for the state semifinals in just its second year of existence and suffered a heartbreaking 1-0 loss in the semifinals to eventually take fourth overall.

In boys basketball, the Wildcats qualified for the state tournament for the first time in 12 years despite getting knocked out in the first round by defending state champion Bishop Miege.

Most schools would love to have that success with their athletic programs, but for Louisburg, that was just the tip of the iceberg. As special as the seasons were for those three programs, the Wildcats also thrived in a few other sports.

Louisburg's cross country program, which has been around for 19 years, had the best season in its history – by far. Not only did the Wildcats have three state medalists for the first time ever, but it had a year that featured the school's first female league champion in Trinity Moore and the best league finish by a male, Wyatt Reece, who took second.

Tim Smith continued the Wildcat success as he became the

school’s first regional cross country champion, and Moore, Reece and Smith each went on to win a state medal. Moore and Smith also set school records for the fastest time.

The Wildcats also qualified the girls team for the first time in school history as Moore, Carlee Gassman, Reilly Alexander, Isabelle Holtzen, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams took third at regionals and eventually 10th at state.

The Wildcat wrestling team tied a program best by qualifying eight for the state tournament and came back with a medal by Ryan Adams, who finished sixth.

Louisburg’s track and field team persevered and qualified for state in 10 events and had two regional champions in Quinn Rigney and Chris Williams. Isabelle Holtzen and T.J. Dover each brought home their first state track medals.

The boys soccer team was one goal away from making its second consecutive trip to the state semifinals, but their run was halted by a loss to McPherson in state quarterfinals. Still, the Wildcats won a regional title, which was the seventh in team history.

Freshman Calvin Dillon led the Wildcat golf team this past year and recorded the program’s first state medal in more than decade as he took 10th overall.

All these things and more I described in detail when releasing my top 10 stories of the year and what a year it was.

Obviously, I haven’t had a chance to look through all the results, but I can’t imagine a more successful year for LHS when you are talking about athletics. There may have been years in the 70s, 80s and 90s that I don’t know about, but I find it hard to imagine one that tops 2017.

Sure, the 2010-11 school year featured two state championship teams in football and boys track and field and that was a

fantastic time to be Wildcat, but as far as calendar years go, 2017 was one to remember.

Even outside the sports world, Louisburg High School put together many great accomplishments as the Wildcat Marching Band was selected to participate in the Tournament of Roses Parade and put on a great show for the nation on New Year's Day.

Then in October, the FFA Food Science team of Hallie Hutsell, Faith Seuferling, Addie Katzer and Hattie Harris won a national championship, while Hutsell and Seuferling placed second and third in the nation, respectively.

I don't get a lot of opportunities to cover programs or groups outside the sports world, but these are fantastic accomplishments and deserved to be recognized.

For me, 2017 was a whirlwind. It seemed around every corner, school history was being made and there aren't many schools around the state that can boast about the successes Louisburg has experienced.

It was an honor for me to cover many of these historic runs in Wildcat history and I hope you all realize how lucky you have it. Louisburg is a school filled with great coaches who care about the student athletes.

Believe me, I know how fortunate I am to be able to be a part of something special and this place is it. If 2018 is half of what 2017 was, it will be a fun ride.

I can't wait for what 2018 has in store and hopefully you all will follow along to see what these Wildcats can accomplish.

Top 10 Stories of 2017



It was a successful, and eventful, 2017 for Louisburg High School athletics and for those who are connected to the Wildcat program. This past year created a lot of school history for LHS and several programs brought back state hardware to Louisburg.

Below are the Top 10 stories from 2017, along with a brief explanation of each. Included in the explanation is the link to the actual story from the event.

This year was a blast to cover and I was blessed to have the opportunity to go along for the ride with many of these. As much fun as it was, I can’t wait for 2018 to begin. Looking forward to it!



Louisburg's Calvin Dillon earns his first state golf medal as a freshman as he took 10th at the state meet.

10. Dillon medals at state golf

Louisburg freshman Calvin Dillon certainly didn't play like a first-year varsity player as he led the Wildcat golf team all season. Dillon finished 10th at the Class 4A state tournament in Wamego and became the first Wildcat golfer to earn a state medal in several years.

Dillon made the state tournament alongside senior Ty Martin, who finished in 28th place overall after he earned his second straight state appearance.



Isabelle Holtzen earned her first state medal in the pole vault as she took seventh back in May.

9. Holtzen, Dover earn first state track medals



T.J. Dover finished eighth

in the discus at the Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championships in Wichita.

Junior Isabelle Holtzen and senior T.J. Dover both ended their track and field seasons on a good note as they earned state medals in late May at the Class 4A state meet in Wichita.

Holtzen had a big season in the pole vault as she ended seventh in the state after she cleared 10 feet. Earlier in the year, Holtzen broke a 15-year old school record in the pole vault as she topped 11-1.

Dover made his second consecutive trip to the state meet and finished strong in his final high school performance. He took eighth with a throw of 143-4.

The Wildcats qualified for the state meet in 10 events and had two regional champions in junior Quinn Rigney (100-meter dash) and sophomore Chris Williams (400 dash).



8. Frontier League adds three schools, says goodbye to another

For the Frontier League, 2017 brought a lot of changes to a league that has featured seven schools for the last several years.

Starting in the 2018-19 season, the Frontier League will add three new schools. Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs each accepted invitations to join the league last April to create a 10-team league.

It is didn’t stay 10 teams for long as De Soto will make the move to a different league during the same season. The current league will be made up of nine schools: Louisburg, Paola, Ottawa, Spring Hill, Baldwin, Eudora, Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs.



7. Louisburg boys soccer wins regional crown

The Louisburg High School boys soccer team was trying to make its second consecutive trip to the state tournament this past season and the Wildcats almost got there.

Although the Wildcats fell to McPherson in the state quarterfinal game in late October, Louisburg put together another successful season that included a 1-0 victory over Independence in the regional championship game.

The Wildcats finished the season with a 13-6 record and earned the school’s first Frontier League championship since 2010.



Junior Ryan Adams celebrates after he earned a state medal at 138 pounds.

6. Wildcat wrestling qualifies eight for state, Adams picks up medal

The Louisburg High School wrestling team had an historic season as it qualified eight for the Class 4A state wrestling tournament, which tied for the most in school history, during the regional tournament in February at Frontenac High School

Thad Hendrix (106 pounds), Nathan Keegan (120), Kyle Allen (126), Ryan Adams (138), Dylan Meyer (145), Austin Moore (170), Austin Raetzel (195) and Mason Koechner (285) all competed at the state tournament in Salina.

Adams earned the school's lone state medal on the season as he finished sixth overall at 138 pounds.



Louisburg head football and boys track and field coach Gary Griffin retired from the district after 32 years. It was one of many changes for the LHS athletic department.

5. LHS goes through staff/coaching changes

The 2017-18 school year looked a lot of different than in previous years for Louisburg High School athletics.

LHS saw a lot of changes in its coaching staff and in the administration as well. Activities director Darin Gagnebin stepped down and was replaced by current director Jeremy Holloway.

In the coaching department, former head and assistant football Gary Griffin retired from the district after 32 years with the high school and Louisburg promoted assistant Robert Ebenstein

as the new Wildcat head football coach.

Jason Nelson resigned his post as the Wildcat head boys basketball coach and he was replaced with Ty Pfannenstiel. Griffin and Greg Darrington also resigned as the boys and girls track and field coaches, and were replaced by Andy Wright (boys) and John Reece (girls).



Louisburg cross country runners (from left) Tim Smith, Trinity Moore and Wyatt Reece each ended the season with a state medal.

4. LHS cross country earns three state medals, qualifies girls team

The Louisburg High School cross country team might have had

its best season in its 19-year history in 2017.

The Wildcats thrived against some of the state's best competition as seniors Wyatt Reece, Tim Smith and sophomore Trinity Moore all earned state medals at the Class 4A meet in Wamego.

Moore recorded the highest finish for a female runner in school history as she finished fifth in the state and broke her own school record in the process with a time of 19 minutes and 47 seconds.

In the boys race, Reece picked up his first state medal with a time of 17 minutes and finished 11th overall. Smith, who won a regional title the week before, came in 15th with a time of 17:05. Smith was the first Wildcat to win a regional title in school history.

Louisburg also made history as the Wildcat girls team qualified for the state meet for the first time after they finished third at their regional in Burlington. Moore joined Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Carlee Gassman, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams to make up the seven-member squad that finished 10th in the team standings at state.

Earlier in the year, Moore became the school's first Frontier League champion, while Reece recorded the highest league finish in boys history as he took second at the league meet.



3. Louisburg boys basketball earns first state tournament berth in 12 years

The season may not have started out the way the Louisburg boys basketball team would have liked, but it certainly finished on a positive note.

Louisburg knocked off rival Paola in the sub-state semfinals and then defeated Fort Scott in the championship game in early March to earn its first sub-state championship since 2005.

The Wildcats earned the No. 6 seed and squared off with eventual champion Bishop Miege at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. The Stags ended the Wildcats’ season with an 81-47 loss.



2. LHS girls soccer finishes fourth at state tournament

Louisburg’s girls soccer program has only been around for two years, but the Wildcats have set high expectations from the beginning and that continued in 2017.

The Wildcats advanced to the Class 4-1A state semifinals for the first time in school history as they defeated Piper with a 2-1 victory in overtime. This victory came off their second consecutive regional title as they knocked off Bonner Springs.

At the state tournament, Louisburg faced off with Thomas More Prep and suffered a heart-breaking 1-0 loss in the semifinals. The Wildcats moved on to the third-place game against Maize South and eventually finished fourth overall.



1. Lady Cat volleyball ends season as state runner-up

The Louisburg High School volleyball team was just one point away from not only becoming the school's first state volleyball champion – but also the first female team to win a state title in Louisburg history.

As close as the Lady Cats got, they came up just short against defending state champion Rose Hill in late October at the Class 4A-Division I state championship. Louisburg fell 23-25, 25-10 and 29-27 in heartbreaking fashion to finish as the state runner-up.

Still, it was an impressive season for Louisburg volleyball as it finished with a 34-10 record. The Lady Cats reeled off wins over Basehor-Linwood, Bishop Miege and Rose Hill in pool play and then downed Wellington in the state semifinals.

The Lady Cats received several accolades as junior Anna Dixon

and senior Sophie McMullen earned first team all-state and all-league honors. Dixon was also named as the Co-Player of the Year in Class 4A-Division I.

Junior Carson Buffington was also named to the all-state tournament team with Dixon and McMullen.

Reece excited for next step at Southwest Minnesota State



After earning his first state medal last month, Louisburg senior Wyatt Reece looked to the future last Wednesday when he signed his letter of intent to run cross country at Southwest Minnesota State.

When he first got into high school, Wyatt Reece had no intention of running in college. The idea hadn’t even crossed his mind.

Wyatt joined the Louisburg cross country team in hopes of staying in shape for basketball and baseball. Before long, however, cross country turned into something a lot more.

“When I was younger running in general was not what I dreamed about,” he said. “Of course I did the middle school track

thing and had a lot of fun, found some success, but I was focused on baseball and basketball.

“I truly fell in love with running the summer going into my sophomore year. Running before that summer was a way to be better in other sports, but running after that summer – was my life.”

Wyatt’s life got a lot more interesting last Wednesday when the Louisburg High School senior signed his letter of intent to run cross country at Southwest Minnesota State, a Division II program in Marshall, Minn.

It was a moment that saw years of hard work come to fruition for Wyatt as he is ready to take the next step in his running career.

“I am extremely excited to go to SMSU,” he said. “Running in college was a reality to me after my sophomore year of cross country. Going to state was that one thing that made me think I had an opportunity to continue my running career and I kept grinding.”

Wyatt was a big part of the Wildcat cross country program the last four years as he ended his career as a three-time state qualifier and captured his first state medal in October after he finished 11th overall in Class 4A.



Louisburg senior Wyatt Reece signed his letter of intent with Southwest Minnesota State last Wednesday. Sitting next to Wyatt (from left) is his sister Lexie, his mother Lisa and sister Katie (on iPad). Standing is LHS assistant cross country coach Arianne Seidl and Wyatt's father, and head coach, John Reece.

It was a moment Wyatt – and his coach and father – John Reece won't forget any time soon. Watching his son become one of the state's top runners and earn a spot on the collegiate level has been rewarding for the Louisburg head coach.

"It has been an honor and a privilege to coach Wyatt," coach Reece said. "Watching him as a coach, he is a great leader, both verbally and through work ethic. He is passionate about the sport of running and he wants to instill his passion in others. As a dad, it has been a positive learning experience. We have grown to appreciate each other's time and commitment to the sport and have learned to put aside the dad or son card

and built the coach and athlete relationship that is needed to be successful.

“The fact that he wanted to pursue running at the next level was thrilling to me. I knew that there was a place for him, we just had to find the right fit. Southwest Minnesota State is the right fit both academically and athletically for Wyatt.”

Athletically, Wyatt liked what he saw out of the Mustang program, including getting a chance to get to know his new coach – Dan Allen. Allen is currently in his third season as the cross country and track coach at the school and Wyatt believes he fits well with the group of runners at SMSU.

“Coach Allen was one of the big reasons I chose SMSU,” Wyatt said. “His goal is to excel his runners, while also making sure they will love running after college. The team was another big factor. I spent a whole night with the team on my visit and all the men and women were very nice and genuine.

“My goal as a freshman is to run varsity for them. I don’t have any time goals yet because I’ve never raced an 8k.”

Wyatt leaves the Louisburg program as one of the top boy runners in Wildcat history. He became the school’s second state medalist on the boys’ side and his 5-kilometer time is toward the top of the leader board.

“Running in (cross country) got me through high school,” he said. “My teammates were always there, and my coaches were too. Louisburg High School cross country will always be my family and I love them as such. I will miss them all and hope they will continue to succeed.”

OPINION: Louisburg cross country was at its best in 2017



The Louisburg High School girls cross country team qualified for state for the first time ever this season and the Lady Cats were just one of several program changing moments in 2017.

For almost 15 years, I have had the opportunity to cover high school athletics and have seen most everything.

From state championship teams to teams struggling to just get a few wins, I thought I had witnessed it all. That was until this year.

The Louisburg High School cross country team opened my eyes as it put together its best season in the program's 19-year history. Cross country, up until recently, was a sport where I haven't had the chance to write about a lot successful runners.

There would be years where Louisburg would struggle to just get someone to state. That in itself is a difficult accomplishment, but the Wildcats just weren't blessed with many gifted runners.

Well, this season, their cup runneth over – no pun intended.

The 2017 campaign will go down as one to remember for the Wildcat cross country team and for good reason. This team pales in comparison to any of the previous 18.

All season, the Wildcats made history wherever you looked and it started with sophomore Trinity Moore.

A year after becoming the school's first female state medalist, Moore took her performance to a whole other level. She won the Frontier League title to become the first runner in school history to do so, then two weeks later, Moore broke her own school record as she finished fifth at the Class 4A state meet in Wamego.



Trinity Moore set school history this season as she became Louisburg's first league champion and a two-time state medalist as a sophomore.

Moore also tied Jason Rose for the best state finish in

Louisburg history as he also took fifth in 2006.

A week before the state meet, Moore and the rest of the Lady Cat runners took a big step forward. Moore, Carlee Gassman, Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Kaitlyn Lewer, Payton Shaffer and Emily Williams became the first Louisburg team to qualify for state in the program's 19 years.

"This was by far the best group of kids we have had yet," Louisburg coach John Reece said. "Coach A (Arianne Seidl) and I really had a great time working with these runners and this year is one for the record books."

All that success didn't stop with the girls, either.

Seniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith provided each other with great competition throughout the season as both runners pushed each other. It often become a toss-up on who would beat the other.

During the Frontier League Championships, Reece recorded the highest league finish in Louisburg boys history as he took runner-up honors. This was a week after Reece edged Smith at the finish to win the Louisburg Invitational.

At regionals, it was Smith's turn as he became the first regional champion in school history with a personal best time of 16 minutes and 42 seconds.



Tim Smith (left) and Wyatt Reece each made history for the Louisburg boys cross country team this season.

That set up one final race between the two Wildcats and it turned out to be a happy ending for both. Reece finished 11th at the Class 4A state meet, while Smith took 15th overall as both earned their first state medals.

Along with Moore, it was also the first time in Louisburg history where the Wildcats had multiple state medalists in one year.

It seemed everywhere you turned in 2017, a new chapter was being written for Louisburg cross country and they did it in one of the more grueling, underappreciated sports there is out there.

Cross country doesn’t get the fanfare of the other fall sports

like football, soccer or volleyball. At most meets, it is mainly just family members of the runners rooting them on to the finish.

It just doesn’t have the popularity of some of the others.

If you were to ask a teenager what sport they want to do, many of them aren’t going to choose the option of running more than 3 miles in a meet and running around town every day in practice. That aspect of hard work doesn’t really speak to a lot of kids.

When I was growing up, I was definitely one of those kids. I always thought people were crazy for wanting to run that far – on purpose. It was craziness.

However, after spending several years around the sport, I have a newfound respect for those wanting to go the extra mile to do something great. The Wildcats certainly put in the extra work this season and it showed.

For me, it was a privilege to witness the best that ever was for Louisburg cross country.

Wildcats bring home multiple medals from state cross country



Louisburg senior Tim Smith, sophomore Trinity Moore and senior Wyatt Reece each earned a state medal Saturday during the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships in Wamego.

WAMEGO – This season has provided a lot of firsts for the Louisburg High School cross country team, so it wouldn't have been complete had the Wildcats not accomplished another feat in program history in what was their final race.

Louisburg runners braved the near-freezing temperatures Saturday during the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships at the Wamego Country Club and left with multiple state medalists.

Sophomore Trinity Moore, along with seniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith, all earned state medals and the Wildcats had multiple medalists for the first time in the program's 19 years.

"It was awesome and emotional to see Wyatt, Tim and Trinity bring home medals," Louisburg coach John Reece said. "It was another first for the program as we have had only one medalist prior Trinity's medal last year. It shows the culmination of lots of hard work and to see that the practice plan set out from the start worked for the runners."

Moore picked a good time to have the best race of her career.

After she medaled 19th overall as freshman last season, Moore ran a personal best time of 19 minutes and 47 seconds to break her own school record and finished fifth in the state.

“Honestly, finishing top five was unexpected, but it felt amazing,” Moore said. “I was feeling good last week in practice and I figured if I could break 20 (minutes), I could possibly finish in the top 10. It was the first time I ran in cold temperatures and I didn’t know what to expect. As soon as the race started I got into a good position, I settled in good and just kept working.”



Trinity Moore works her way down a hill during the Class 4A state meet Saturday in Wamego. Moore finished fifth overall.

The Louisburg sophomore got off to a good start in what was a

fast paced girls race. Moore stayed toward the front of the pack, and at the two mile mark, started to make her move.

“Trinity is a gutsy runner,” coach Reece said. “To see her do what she did this year is no surprise. She has begun to learn how to race the 5K, and with her competitive drive she is – and will be – a force to be reckoned with the next two years. Our league will pose all of the competition needed to continue to push her to the limit and beyond. The next two years will be fun.”

Wyatt Reece and Smith both came into the state meet after missing out on a state medal the year before. This was Reece’s third appearance on the state cross country stage and Smith’s second.

Both runners got what they were looking for in their final high school race. Reece finished 11th overall with a time of 17:00 and Smith, who won the regional title last week in Burlington, came in 15th in 17:05.

Reece and Smith had to deal with a fast start to the boys race as Reece stayed in front of the field, while Smith was in the middle of the pack that featured 105 runners. The crowded start made for some obstacles to begin the race.



Wyatt Reece stays ahead of a group of runners Saturday. Reece medaled 11th overall.

“I’m super excited about my medal and I felt my race went well overall,” Wyatt said. “I started in about 12th place and I floated there the whole race. There was a lot of bumping in the first mile, but ‘if you ain’t rubbing, you ain’t racing.’”

The cold weather affected Smith throughout the race as he stayed in the middle of the field through the first mile, but he made his move in the last mile to work himself into medal contention.

“It feels great having a state medal, just knowing that I worked for it,” Smith said. “My goal at the beginning of the year was for me and Wyatt to bring home of one of those medals. I feel like we both ran amazing.

“I was struggling the whole race because of the weather, but I just kept saying in my head that this is my last race and my last shot. If don’t give it everything I have then I will regret it for the rest of my life. That first mile I was well back in the top 50 range, so I really had to work to get up to where I needed to be. By the last mile, I was relying on my coaches to tell me what place I was in.”



Louisburg senior Tim Smith works his way through the field Saturday in Wamego. Smith took 15th overall.

Saturday also marked the first time a full Louisburg girls team competed in a state meet. The Lady Cats finished 10th in the team standings with 225 points.

Along with Moore's fifth place finish, sophomore Carlee Gassman took 53rd overall in 21:42 and junior Kaitlyn Lewer was next on the team in 75th in 22:27.

Senior Isabelle Holtzen (23:11), senior Reilly Alexander (23:28), junior Payton Shaffer (23:34) and sophomore Emily Williams (24:42) finished 88th, 96th, 98th and 101st, respectively.



The Louisburg High School girls cross country team poses for a picture prior to their state race.

"To qualify a girls team after 19 years of trying was amazing," coach Reece said. "They all worked so hard during the season, and the team medals they won and just missed out on, showed their determination and drive. We laid out before them what our regional was going to be like and what they needed to do to get to state and they did it. Then they went to state and ran much faster than our first trip to Wamego earlier in the year.

“Once again they put forth their best effort and beat a team that beat us at regionals. We could not be prouder of these ladies, including the alternates, as they took on the challenge and accomplished it with hard work and a team spirit that lasted all season.”

Smith wins regional meet, Reece also qualifies for state



Louisburg senior Tim Smith gets out in front of Galena’ Matthew Oglesby during the boys Class 4A regional meet Saturday in Burlington. Smith became the school’s first regional champion as he won with a personal best time of 16:42.

BURLINGTON – Tim Smith knew he was going to have to get off to a fast start if he wanted to stay in front of the pack during the Class 4A regional cross country meet Saturday in Burlington.

As it turned out, the Louisburg senior was the fastest of the bunch.

Smith became the first boys cross country runner in Louisburg history to win a regional race and did so in impressive fashion. He ran a personal best time of 16 minutes and 42 seconds to become a regional champion.

“For this being my senior year, it means everything to me,” Smith said. “I really don’t know how to put it into words. It feels awesome and I just love it.”

Smith earned a state bid for the second consecutive season and he won’t be going alone. Senior teammate Wyatt Reece qualified for state for the third straight year as he finished seventh in 17:24 and just missed out on sixth by less than a second.

“I am just excited,” Reece said. “I am hopeful that a third time will be the charm and that I can get a medal out of it. It was a little bit of a rough race, but we are going to go have fun at state in about a week.

“I tightened up about a mile and a half in, so then I just started counting places to see if I will get in or not and it just ended up working in my favor.”

Smith and Galena’s Matthew Oglesby found themselves at the front of the race most way and Smith was right on Oglesby’s heels. However, due to a strong wind that made running difficult at times, Smith wanted to stay behind Oglesby as long as possible.

“I usually start out a little slower, but I knew I would have to go out with a little more kick this time to get out front,” Smith said. “I think Wyatt and I started really well in that first mile and then we both starting picking off people in front of us. That second mile was tough because of the wind, but after that we learned to tuck in behind people and let them take the draft for us.”



Louisburg senior Wyatt Reece stays with a Girard runner while Wildcat coach John Reece urges Wyatt on Saturday in Burlington.

Then in the final mile, Smith had enough energy left to pull out in front and his time ended up being the second fastest in school history.

“Tim ran an outstanding race,” Louisburg coach John Reece said. “It was amazing watching him run and it was kind of similar to what Wyatt did at league the week before. He ran the race he had to run and he caught up to the leader. When Tim put pressure on the leader, the other kid just collapsed. After it was over, Tim was still living on the adrenaline rush and ran a great race.”

As a team, the Wildcats finished 10th overall with 200 points. Girard was the regional champion with 74 points, Ottawa second with 87 and Iola was third with 118.

Freshman Luke Faulkner finished third on the Wildcat team and 61st overall in 20:01. Fellow freshman Cade Holtzen was 67th in 20:24.

Sophomore Evan Murphy (20:42), freshman Carson Houchen (20:48) and sophomore Colin Cook (21:02) finished 74th, 77th and 85th, respectively.

Both Smith and Reece will try to earn a state medal Saturday when they travel to Wamego for the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championship at the Wamego Country Club. The 4A boys race is set to begin at 11:45 a.m.

“I hope we can get both of those guys down there and finish in the top 20 and get them both medals,” coach Reece said. “That is the plan, and that is what it has been since the beginning of the year. We want to get them back to state and up on the podium. That is what we are shooting for.”

After all the great finishes both runners have had this season, they know none of those compares to what Saturday holds.

“We haven’t really been training to run fast at regionals, we have been training to run fast at state,” Wyatt said. “We have a week of training to go and we will see what happens.”

Smith is also excited for what is in store for this weekend.

“To finish in the top 15 or 20 at state and bring home a state medal would be awesome,” Smith said. “Wyatt and I just want to go out there and give it our best and make it one great last race.”

Louisburg girls cross country makes history with state bid



The Louisburg girls cross country team qualified for state for the first time in program history Saturday during the Class 4A regional meet in Burlington. Members of the team are (from left) Emily Williams, Carlee Gassman, Kaitlyn Lewer, Trinity Moore, Reilly Alexander, Payton Shaffer and Isabelle Holtzen.

BURLINGTON – The Louisburg High School cross country team has rewritten the history books a lot this season.

However, this chapter might be the biggest one yet.

For the first time in program history, the Wildcats will be sending a team to state as the girls team finished third overall at the Class 4A regional meet Saturday in Burlington. Louisburg finished with 108 points and edged out fourth-place Iola by one point as the top three teams earn an automatic berth to the state meet.

Trinity Moore, Carlee Gassman, Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, Payton Shaffer, Kaitlyn Lewer and Emily Williams had some of their best performances of the season as it put them over the top. For the first time in the program's 19 years, a team will represent Louisburg at state.

"My first reaction was 'Wow, we just made history for cross country at Louisburg,'" Alexander said. "I couldn't stop

smiling at the thought that we now would be able to fill a spot on the blank cross country board in the gym. Also I'm so happy and honored to say that I was a part of the first cross country team to make it to state."

The opportunity to go to state was especially meaningful for Alexander and Holtzen, the team's two seniors. Not only was their season on the line Saturday, but it could have been their final race in a Louisburg uniform.

As it turns out, they will get to suit up one last time.



Louisburg senior Isabelle Holtzen sprints toward the finish line Saturday in Burlington.

"Honestly, it just feels unbelieveable," Holtzen said. "At practice (Friday) and the day before, coach (John) Reece came

up to all of us during a team meeting and he was telling us that we would have a chance, but that we would have to run our hearts out. I know the entire race, as I ran part of it with Reilly and part of it with Peyton, we were just encouraging each other that this was for state. For it to actually happen is just outstanding."

Following the race, there was some confusion on how the final results were going to shake out. The original results showed Louisburg finished second overall, and when the team was informed, they were ecstatic.

A few moments later, it was found that a runner from another team was missing, which meant they had to recalculate the points. It left for some tense moments among the Lady Cat runners.

When all was said and done, the Lady Cats still secured their state berth. Fort Scott finished first in the team standings with 61 points and Anderson County was runner-up with 85.

"I was extremely nervous," Holtzen said. "We have been looking at different ranking web sites and it had us ranked fourth in all of them. When we first found out that we had gotten second, it was just amazing. We were freaking out and were just super excited. I was just so happy that I was crying, everyone else was crying and we were hugging. Then to have it taken away was really scary. I was just happy to get third and to be able to go."

Moore led the Lady Cats as she ran toward the front of the pack for the entire race. She passed several runners in the final mile to eventually finish third individually with a time of 20 minutes and 24 seconds.



Kaitlyn Lewer (left) and Trinity Moore give hugs to their teammates to celebrate their state berth Saturday.

Moore, a sophomore, will make her second consecutive trip to state after she finished 19th overall and earned a state medal.

“It feels really good to be going to state again, but it feels even better to go as a team,” Moore said. “The race was really, really fast. I didn’t realize it when we hit the two-mile mark that I had less than a mile to go, so I had to make my move.

“I just had to make sure I had enough energy to finish in the end and it took some hard work to get up there. I hope I can go to state and do what I did last year and hopefully pass some girls at the end. Hopefully our team can do well, too.”

Gassman was second on the Lady Cat team with a time of 21:39 and finished 14th overall. Holtzen ran a 22:29, which was her

best time of the season, and took 27th.

Alexander, who finished 32nd, ran a personal best time of 22:54. Shaffer also recorded a personal best of 23:11 and took 38th.



Senior Reilly Alexander leads a pack of runners around a turn Saturday at the Class 4A regional race in Burlington.

“The regional race for me was one of the toughest mentally,” Alexander said. “Thankfully I knew the course from the year prior, but the thought of my teammates counting on me to do my best really helped me push to go my hardest. I was able to work with Isabelle towards the end of the race and we pushed each other to finish out our potentially last race of our senior year”

Lewer (23:23), who ran a season best, and Williams (24:16) rounded out the Lady Cat team in 43rd and 58th, respectively.

Louisburg will take part in one final race Saturday when it travels to Wamego for the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships. The girls race will start at 10 a.m. at the Wamego Country Club.

“We have had teams with opportunities, but for one reason or another it just hadn’t worked out,” coach Reece said. “This year, the opportunity was there and from the start of the race they worked very hard. The monkey is kind of off our back now. We can go (to state) and have fun. We ran at Wamego earlier in the year, so they know exactly what they are getting in to. It is going to be a good week.”

Photo gallery: Regional cross country



Here is a photo gallery’s from today’s Class 4A regional cross country meet in Burlington. The Louisburg girls’ team finished third overall and qualified the entire team for state. Senior Tim Smith won the boys side, while teammate Wyatt Reece took

sixth and took sixth. The runners will compete in the Class 4A state meet Saturday in Wamego.





Senior Reilly Alexander leads a pack of runners around a turn Saturday at the Class 4A regional race in Burlington.


Dam Site Park
KSHSAA
5740
KSHSAA
5820
LHS



Louisburg senior Isabelle Holtzen sprints toward the finish line Saturday in Burlington.


KSHSAA
5759
KSHSAA
5821
KSHSAA


LOUISBURG
KSHSAA
5824
LHS



Louisburg senior Wyatt Reece stays with a Girard runner while Wildcat coach John Reece urges Wyatt on Saturday in Burlington.


GALENA
KSHSAA
5903
5941


KSHSAA
5859
KSHSAA
5936


5872
LOUISBURG
KSHSA
593
CC
LHS


FRONTENAC
5892
FORT SCOTT
5887
LOUISBURG
KSHSAA
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LOUISBURG
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