

Smith, Reece and Moore garner medals at Wamego



Louisburg senior Wyatt Reece fist bumps a Eudora runner during the Wamego Invitational on Saturday at the Wamego Golf Course. Reece, along with teammates Tim Smith and Trinity Moore, earned medals.

WAMEGO – The Louisburg High School cross country team found itself on the same course Saturday where the Wildcats hope to end their season in late October.

Louisburg competed in the Wamego Invitational on Saturday at the Wamego Golf Course – the site of the Class 4A state meet. The Wildcat runners gave it a test run and they liked what they saw.

Seniors Tim Smith and Wyatt Reece, along with sophomore Trinity Moore, returned to Wamego for the first time since qualifying for the state meet a year ago. Moore left with a state medal, but all three left with a medal this time around.

Smith led the Wildcat runners as he finished 10th overall with a time of 17 minutes and 24 seconds, while Reece came in 13th in 17:36 as both bested their times from the state meet.

“Wyatt and Tim took on the beast and slayed it,” Louisburg coach John Reece. “They worked together, and with other Frontier League runners, throughout the race and put

themselves in the top 15 and ran their best times for the course."

Coach Reece also brought Moore and the rest of the Lady Cat varsity team to the meet to give them even more experience running on a difficult course that features several hills and turns.

Moore earned a medal after she finished 26th overall in 21:59 in what was a competitive girls race. Carlee Gassman (24:14) was second on the team and 78th overall, while seniors Reilly Alexander (24:48) and Isabelle Holtzen (24:48) finished 100th and 101st, respectively.

Kaitlyn Lewer (110th), Emily Williams (114th) and Payton Shaffer (129th) rounded out the Lady Cat team.

"It is always a plus to run a course more than once, especially the state course," coach Reece said. "The girls team ran very well. Trinity worked her way into a medal and the other six worked hard on a difficult course. It was a great opportunity and a definite learning experience."

The Wildcats split up earlier in week, and since much of the varsity team competed at Wamego, the rest of the team competed at a Frontier League triangular with Ottawa and Spring Hill.

Louisburg brought home several medals from the Ottawa course, including eight on the girls side and three for the boys.

Shaylor Whitham led the Lady Cats as she finished eighth in 27:21. Natalie George (11th), Abby Crooks (12th), Avery Graham (14th), Alex Miller (15th), Anna Niebrugge (16th) and Elizabeth Kratochvil (17th) also earned medals on the Eisenhower Road Course.



Louisburg runners (from left) Cade Holtzen, Carson Houchen and Evan Murphy were all smiles after earning a medal Thursday at Ottawa.

Freshman Cade Holtzen led Louisburg on the boys side as he took 13th in 21:29. Evan Murphy (17th) and Carson Houchen (19th) each earned their first varsity medal as well.

Luke Faulkner (21st), Dawson Barnes (24th), Gareth Baus (25th), Jackson Staab (26th), Parker Perentis (27th), Keith Estle (29th), Rian Mallory (30th) also competed for Louisburg.

The Wildcats return to action Thursday when it travels to the Wellsville Invitational. Races are set to begin at 4 p.m.

Wildcats race way to four medals in opener



Louisburg High School seniors Tim Smith (left) and Wyatt Reece get off to a good start Thursday during the Jerry Howarter Invitational in Garnett. Smith and Reece medaled fourth and sixth, respectively.

GARNETT – The Louisburg High School cross country team has been practicing hard leading up to the Jerry Howarter Invitational on Thursday in Garnett.

The Wildcats have spent the last several weeks trying to get in a shape for what is a grueling season and they found out just how in shape they were when they took to the difficult Garnett course.

Despite the large, steep hills, four Wildcats left with their first varsity medals and a nice momentum boost heading into the season.

Seniors Tim Smith and Wyatt Reece took fourth and sixth, respectively, in the boys race to grab medals. Sophomore Trinity Moore finished 17th overall and fellow sophomore Carlee Gassman took 30th to earn medals in the girls race.

“Wyatt and Tim finished almost exactly where I thought they would,” Louisburg coach John Reece said. “I was thinking a bit faster, but after looking at last year’s times, I was very

happy as Wyatt improved by almost a minute.

"Trinity ran a good race and it was a very fast girls race. Carlee medaling in her first race was fantastic."

On the boys side, Smith ran a time of 17 minutes and 54 seconds to lead the Wildcat runners and Wyatt was right behind him with an 18:08. Baldwin's Jacob Bailey won the meet in 17:22, and his teammate Parker Wilson, was second at 17:24. Eudora won the team title with 42 points and Baldwin was second with 53.

Louisburg had two others run varsity alongside Smith and Reece. Sophomore Evan Murphy was 56th in 21:19 and freshman Cade Holtzen took 58th in 21:21.

Moore led Louisburg in what was a competitive varsity girls race. She finished with a time of 22:54 and Gassman, a transfer from Iowa, ran a 24:04.



Carlee Gassman was one of two Louisburg girls to earn medals Thursday in Garnett.

Santa Fe Trail's Hannah Honeyman won the varsity competition in 20:16 and Baldwin's Ambrynn Stewart was second in 20:30. Baldwin won the team crown with 35 points and Eudora was second with 70 out of nine teams.

The Wildcat girls, which finished fifth with 149 points, had a good first time out according to coach Reece.

Senior Isabelle Holtzen just missed a medal by one spot as she took 31st in 24:16. Payton Shaffer came in 41st in her varsity debut in 24:55.

Kaitlyn Lewer (25:34) and Reilly Alexander (25:36) took 50th and 51st, respectively. Shaylor Whitham (27:45) rounded out the Louisburg roster in 60th.

"The rolling hills are a challenge for the first meet and all the runners did a great job," coach Reece said. "The cooler temperatures definitely helped."

"I was happy with their performance. We had first race nerves pretty bad but those soon went away once the gun went off. My veteran runners matched times from last year or improved which was awesome and my new runners competed well."

Louisburg also brought home several medals in the sub-varsity races.

Freshman Carson Houchen finished toward the top of the junior varsity boys race. Houchen, who is in his first year of cross country, took fourth overall in 21:19.

Sophomore Emily Williams ran a 25:49 to finish 11th and medal in the junior varsity girls competition. Abby Crooks medaled third in the beginner 2-mile girls race in 16:07 and Colin Cook (14:08) took ninth in the beginner boys race.

"We brought home several medals and the young runners ran great," coach Reece said. "The overall boys performance shows me that there is a young varsity team ready to start competing, and with experience, they will improve. The girls who did not run varsity have put pressure on the ones that did as there are now nine girls to look at when fielding my seven varsity runners.

"We had great parent support and the team thanks them for sticking around with the delay caused by the timing system. Nothing like getting medals awarded by the light of cell phones."

A majority of the Wildcats will face another tough course this Thursday at the Ottawa Invitational, while a few varsity will venture to Wamego on Saturday for the Wamego Invitational.

State qualifiers look to pace Louisburg cross country



Louisburg High School sophomore Trinity Moore hopes to garner her second consecutive state medal after she finished 19th overall at the 2016 Kansas State Cross Country Championships in Wamego. Moore is one of three state qualifiers to return for the Wildcats.

The Louisburg High School cross country team set the bar high last season as the Wildcats qualified three runners for the state meet and one of them earned the program's first medal since 2006.

Despite all those accomplishments, the Wildcats are looking for even more this season as they return all three state qualifiers in seniors Wyatt Reece, Tim Smith and sophomore Trinity Moore.

Throw in a group of returning runners, especially on the girls' side, and the Wildcats are expecting big things out of

their program.

"This season could be very special for both groups," Louisburg coach John Reece said. "We have added some great new runners from the freshman class, first timers from sophomores to seniors and some new students to the district. The end of the season could be interesting."



Senior Wyatt Reece has qualified for the state meet the last two seasons and hopes to do the same this season.

Moore leads a girls team that plans on being competitive, not only with the opposition, but with each other. Moore medaled at state as a freshman last season and became the first female runner in Louisburg history to earn a state cross country medal.

It was a special season for her and one that she hopes to recreate with a few more friends this time around.

"I am really excited to get the season started," Moore said. "We have a great group of girls that are working hard. Medaling at state was huge, but I know I still have to give my best effort and work hard every race. Now that I have been to the state meet, I hope to get back and this time with the team."

The Wildcat girls have a large number of runners who are trying fill those seven varsity spots. Along with Moore, the Wildcats return several with varsity experience, including seniors Isabelle Holtzen, Reilly Alexander, juniors Kaitlyn Lewer, Shaylor Whitham and Alex Miller and sophomore Emily Williams.

Throw in transfer Carlee Gassman and newcomers Payton Shaffer, Avery Graham and Kennady Wilkerson and the Wildcats have high expectations for the girls team, including what the runners have displayed in practice.

"I am anticipating difficulty in having a constant top 7 girls team this year," coach Reece said. "We have more than 10 runners at the moment that could be considered for the varsity team. With this many girls, the season should be competitive among the teammates.

"Trinity will improve over last year through experience alone and you only get what you put into it. What she puts into the season will be returned through performance at meets. A strong group of teammates will make the whole group improve as they push each other."

The boys side isn't quite as crowded, but it is top heavy as both Wyatt Reece and Smith try to make a return trip to Wamego and the state meet in late October.



Senior Tim Smith earned a spot in the state cross country meet last season in just his first year with the program.

Wyatt is a two-time state qualifier and has improved each season, including a 48th place finish a year ago and Smith took 68th in what was a tough boys field. Wyatt took another step toward getting his first state medal over the summer when he attended a cross country camp in Colorado Springs, in an effort to get in even better shape.

However, who will run alongside of Reece and Smith is a bit of a mystery as the Wildcats feature several young runners.

"Wyatt and Tim will be our top two runners as we start the season," coach Reece said. "We have at least 3-4 others who will move up so that we can field a varsity team at most meets and toe the line at regionals with a varsity team this year."

Louisburg will get it all started Thursday when it travels to Garnett for the Jerry Howarter Invitational. Freshman races will begin at 3:30 p.m., with junior varsity and varsity to follow.

Photo Gallery: LHS Community Pep Rally



Louisburg drum major Chloe Philgreen directs the band during the Fall Community Pep Rally on Thursday at Louisburg High School.

Parents and students at Louisburg High School flooded the LHS gymnasium Thursday for the 20th Annual Community Pep Rally that was sponsored by First National Bank.

They were all provided with a free meal courtesy of First National and Chris Cakes, which was followed by the introduction of all the fall sports and activities. The LHS cheerleaders and Jazzy Cats performed routines, while the

Wildcat band also performed musical numbers throughout the evening.

Below is a photo gallery from the event on what was a great way to kick off the school year.







First National Bank president Bob Nauman speaks to the crowd.



Scholar's Bowl coach Christine Staab talks about the team's upcoming season.



LHS FFA adviser Jim Morgan introduces his national team members.



Jazzy Cat coach Kassy Miller introduces her 2017-18 team.





New LHS cheer coach Dana Shaffer talks about the success of her team.







LHS cross country coach John Reece talks to the crowd about his team.





Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley introduces his squad.



LHS volleyball coach Jessica Compliment talks about her excitement for the upcoming season.



LHS seniors (from left) Mikayla Quinn, Sarah Wilson, Sophie McMullen and Ainsley Vance.



LHS debate and forensics coach Claire Haflich talks about her team.



New LHS football coach Robert Ebenstein speaks to the crowd.



Twirler Emalee Bigley, along with drum majors Mikayla Quinn, Chloe Philgreen and Shaylor Whitham were introduced to the crowd.



Louisburg band director John Cisetti talks to the crowd about the upcoming Rose Bowl Parade.





Fall sports season kicks off with first day of practice



Louisburg senior Kris Light goes through a drill during the first day of soccer practice Monday. All four Wildcat teams got their season started with workouts on Monday as the fall

sports season kicks off.

Summer time and vacations are coming to an end just in time for fall sports to heat up as four Louisburg High School teams had their first day of practice Monday.

The Wildcat cross country, football, soccer and volleyball teams got the 2017 season kicked off right with either two-a-days or tryouts. Each program also had strong numbers out as they either increased or stayed the same from the year before.

All four Louisburg teams experienced success last season and they hope it carries over into this year.

Louisburg soccer made program history as the Wildcats advanced to the state semifinals for the first time. Cross country also had a big season as it qualified three for the state meet.

Football is coming off a regional championship, while the volleyball team was one victory away from reaching the state tournament.

Louisburg had a lot of positives going its way in 2016, but all four coaches realize it is time to start anew.

The Wildcat football team opened practice with approximately 60 players out as they start two-a-days for the rest of this week under first-year coach Robert Ebenstein. The players will practice in helmets and shoulder pads through Thursday and full pads Friday. They will conclude the week with a scrimmage Saturday morning.



Louisburg junior Austin Moore and the rest of the Wildcat football team begin two-a-day practices this week.

Louisburg, which finished with eight wins last season, is hoping to build on that success.

“I thought practice went well,” Ebenstein said. “The guys and coaches were excited to get going and the guys brought a ton of enthusiasm and had a great first day of practice.”

The Wildcat soccer team saw a big jump in numbers as they had 45 players sign up to play this season and the team will be going through tryouts through Wednesday.

Practice opened at the track as the players ran the mile at 7 a.m. Monday, watched a concussion video in the afternoon and hit the practice field for the first time shortly after. The Wildcats are hard at work under second-year coach Kyle Conley, making sure they use the momentum they created after their

fourth place finish at state last season.

"I know for the boys and coaches it is fantastic to get back to the field," Conley said. "We are very excited and anxious to prove last year was not a fluke. We will have to work even harder than we did last year, because we will not be able to fly under the radar. The boys are ready for that challenge and I think they are going to give it their all to see how this journey transpires. The boys are focused and determined. I am really excited to also see what this group can achieve as a team."



Sophomore Trinity Moore is one of three returning state qualifiers for the Louisburg cross country team.

The cross country team also has high expectations for itself as the Wildcats return three state qualifiers in seniors Wyatt Reece, Tim Smith and sophomore Trinity Moore. Moore garnered a

state medal after finishing 19th as a freshman at the Class 4A meet and became the first female runner in Louisburg history to earn a state honor.

Runners hit the streets around town on Monday for a 30-minutre workout to begin to build their base for the season and will progress as the season goes along. Head coach John Reece has 35 runners out this season, which is close to last year's number, as the Wildcats prepare for what they hope is a special season.

"My summer crew of runners are excited to get going, some even started altering their summer runs on their own to start preparing for the season," coach Reece said. "We are working on duration runs vs. miles. Instead of going for a 5-mile run, I will have them run for a minimum of say 45 minutes and allow some to extend up to 60 minutes of training, which some runners could reach close to eight miles within the hour. Our non-duration days will be focused on speed and lots of repeats with active recovery. There will be no walking for us."

The Lady Cat volleyball team felt out of place at the end of last season. Louisburg's year ended sooner than it would have liked after losing in the substate championship game and didn't qualify for state for the first time in five years.



Louisburg senior Sophie McMullen goes through a drill during the first day of tryouts Monday at Louisburg High School.

Louisburg is hard at work in hopes of earning a state tournament bid. Head coach Jessica Compliment has 35 players out this season, and after two more days of tryouts, will get practice in full swing.

The Lady Cats open their season at home on Aug. 26 when they host the Frontier League preseason tournament and the junior varsity will compete in Paola. All three teams will play again at home on Aug. 29 against Blue Valley Southwest.

"The coaching staff is excited to get the season started and begin preparing for the preseason league tournament for varsity and junior varsity," Compliment said. "We are looking forward to a lot of home matches this season and the athletes were ready to start tryouts and get the season kicked off."

Holloway excited for new role as LHS activities director



Louisburg High School activities director Jeremy Holloway is looking forward to his new position as he starts his 17th year in the USD 416 school district.

Growing up, Jeremy Holloway wasn't one to stay in a place for too long.

Holloway spent most of his childhood and young adult life moving from place to place. He wasn't the type of person who envisioned himself putting down roots.

"I was a constant migrant," Holloway said.

That was until he moved to Louisburg with his wife Megan. Now instead of a migrant, Holloway is deep-rooted in a town he loves.

It made his decision, almost two months ago, an easy one.

Back in June, Holloway was hired as the new Louisburg High School activities director and assistant principal, following the resignation of former activities director Darin Gagnebin. Holloway, who has spent the last 16 years as a teacher at Louisburg Middle School, is ready for the new challenge.

"I am really looking forward to it," Holloway said. "I have been here in Louisburg for 17 years. I never lived anywhere for more than four years in my life until I came to Louisburg. I never knew what it was like to be a part of a community and when I got here I just fell in love with the town. I was excited to become a part of it and Louisburg became important to me. The teaching was great and getting to know all the kids and see them grow up all the way through college was fun. Now I see some of my former students teaching in the building here and it is an amazing feeling. It just felt like home to me."

Fate seemed to step in at the right time for Holloway. He entered the summer still planning to teach history at the middle school, but the dominoes quickly started to fall into place.

Holloway was well on his way to getting his administration degree this past school year as he was planning on holding on to it until something in Louisburg came open. He didn't have to wait long.

"I had to get recertified, so I talked with my wife and I said why get an education masters if it is just going to move me on the pay scale," he said. "Why not get an administration degree to have options? There are other places near here that are looking for people, but that isn't what I want. The only move I would make is to stay in Louisburg. I happened to be down in Eureka Springs on vacation and I got a text in middle of night that Gagnebin had resigned. I had just got my diploma the day before we left. I applied and it turned out well and hopefully

it was a good thing."

Louisburg USD 416 superintendent Dr. Brian Biermann had to sift through more than 20 different applicants for the job, but he believes Holloway is going to do great things in the position.

"Jeremy has been a loyal and dedicated teacher and coach in our community for 17 years," Dr. Biermann said. "Jeremy possesses many strong leadership attributes that will allow him to be a strong, instructional leader at Louisburg High School. He is passionate about education, has a strong work ethic and is committed to our community.

"Jeremy is all about building positive relationships with students, staff and the community. For 17 years he has been building these relationships. Now, he will be able to build upon his unique skill set in a leadership position in our district. I am excited to see the great things Mr. Holloway can contribute to our district and community in this new role."

One of the first things Holloway wanted to do was to get to know his new coaching staff. Several new coaches were hired this past school year and he wanted to see what they were all about.

"I just want them to feel comfortable with me and let them understand that I am approachable," Holloway said. "That relationship piece is huge. I am getting to know where they are from, how many kids they have and I want them to feel comfortable coming to me. We do lose some great experience, but we have gained some capable coaches and a lot of enthusiasm. I just want to be a positive impact for them."

Since he started officially on July 24, Holloway has been hard at work in several different areas, but one of the bigger things going on now is the shuffling of the Frontier League.

The league, which will be at seven schools this year, will move up to nine starting for the 2018-19 school year. Bonner Springs, Tonganoxie and Piper will join the league, while De Soto will depart.

Baldwin, an original league member, is concerned the school will move down to Class 3A starting in 2018-19, thanks to changes in the classification system. If it happens, it will create scheduling conflicts for football.

"The biggest conflict right now is Baldwin is right on the edge of becoming 3A and they think it will happen," Holloway said. "If Baldwin is in our league, which is what we plan on, they are required to play five district games for football, which only leaves them three league games. If only three league teams play Baldwin, then the rest of the league teams have to find another team to play. I have schools from Lansing, Independence, Coffeyville, Chanute and other schools calling me trying to lock up games. There are so many different scenarios so we just have to wait and see. That is one thing that I am really working on right now."

With the activity season fast approaching, Holloway is excited for everything to get underway. He is also looking forward to getting to know the fan base more.

"I have always been highly impressed of Louisburg and the support of its teams and the turnout we will get, especially for football games," Holloway said. "I encourage Louisburg to continue the tradition of being a class act. I think that every town has its own culture and a lot of it starts with the coaches. If your coaches are harassing refs, your players are probably going to start to learn that they can do that and that will trickle down to the parents and crowd. Without pointing fingers, there are certain places where that is the climate. I think Louisburg has been great. There are always going to be situations, but I would encourage fans and parents to support our coaches and let them coach."

"I am looking forward to an exciting year. We have great coaches, that are experienced and they are very innovative. They are organized and they all seem truly excited about what is going on. The community can rest assured that the coaches that are in place right now have the best interest of the kids and the programs."

Opinion: Time to look back and enjoy successes



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

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

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

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

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

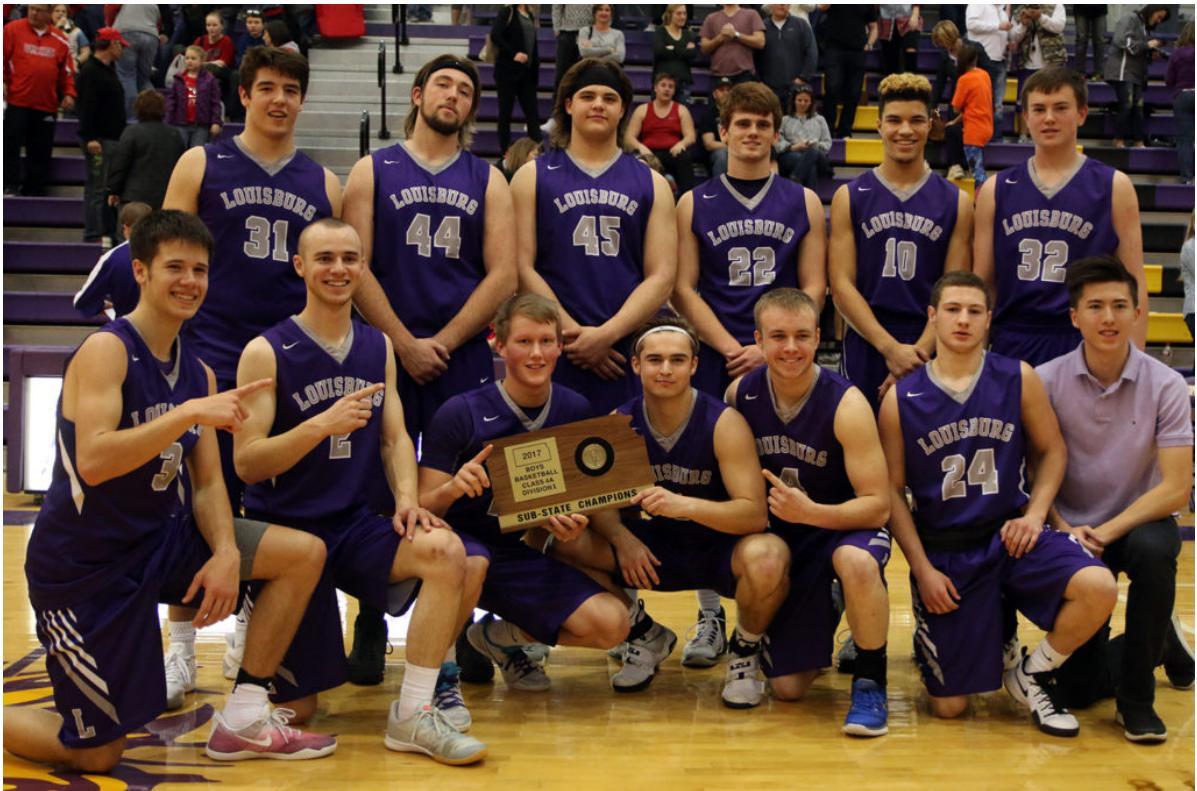
The Wildcats had a special year in several sports, and before we focus on the 2017-18 campaign, we should look back at what the 16-17 season brought us. Just take a look at what these Wildcats accomplished.

- There is probably no better place to start than the Louisburg soccer teams. Both the boys and girls teams earned spots in the state semifinals for the first time in program history and both finished fourth. The boys team made it to state for the first time in their 14 years, while the girls advanced to the state tournament in just their second season.



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

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



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

- The Louisburg football team made quite the run in the 2016 season. The Wildcats won their first playoff game since 2012 and earned a regional title in the process with a win over Independence. Even though their season came to an end in the next round to eventual state champion Bishop Miege, the Wildcats' still finished with an 8-3 record.
- Wrestling had another big season as the Wildcats qualified eight for the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. Although Ryan Adams was the lone state medalist, as he finished sixth overall at 138 pounds, the Wildcats tied a school record for number of state qualifiers that was set back in 1984.

- In cross country, the Wildcats sent three runners to the state meet and had their first state medalist since 2006 when freshman Trinity Moore finished 19th overall, as she, Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith competed at the Wamego meet. Moore was also the school's first female runner to earn a state medal.
- Freshman golfer Calvin Dillon became the Wildcats' first state medalist in several years as he finished 10th at the Class 4A state tournament and was one of two Wildcats, along with Ty Martin, to qualify for state. Dillon could quite possibly be the first freshman golfer in school history to get a medal, but since golf stats aren't quite as well kept, it is hard to tell for sure.
- T.J. Dover and Isabelle Holtzen came through with state medals of their own following the state track meet. Holtzen finished seventh at the Class 4A meet in the pole vault and Dover was eighth in the discus as both medaled for the first time. Holtzen also broke the school record in the pole vault earlier in the season after she cleared 11 feet, 1 inch.
- The girls basketball and softball teams both had big improvements from a season ago as they each reached 10 wins despite falling in the first round of their sub-state and regional tournaments. Softball doubled their win total from 2016, while the girls basketball team improved by seven victories.
- The Louisburg volleyball team advanced to the sub-state championship game against rival Paola and was just a few points away from advancing to its fifth consecutive state tournament. The Lady Cats also finished the season with 23 victories.

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

Sometimes we get caught up in losses or not meeting

expectations, when in fact, compared to a lot of schools, Louisburg exceeds expectations – at least it does mine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gagnebin steps down as LHS activities director



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

Darin Gagnebin has a fondness for Louisburg High School, his

coaches and students.

That made it all the more hard to say goodbye.

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

Gagnebin spent a total of 17 years in the Louisburg school district, with the last six spent as activities director. He was also a teacher and coach for 11 years.

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

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

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

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

"I told my wife that I was really excited about coming back

next year and I felt we made some good hires. We have a passionate coaching staff coming on and they are great people with new ideas. It just happened out of the blue."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Changes to classification system will impact Louisburg



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

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

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

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

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

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

In football, Louisburg will no longer have district play as

the playoffs will begin in week nine. Class 4A will play an eight-game regular season and then each side of the state will be seeded in a bracket from 1 through 16, based on their record.

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

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

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

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

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

Basketball schedules will also be different with the addition of the new league teams in 2018-19. There will no longer be

double round-robin schedules. There will be eight league games, six tournament games and athletic directors will have to find a way to fill the other six.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It was a shock because I didn't think it was going to pass," Gagnebin said. "Other than the playoff system, in my opinion,

it doesn't do anything for Class 4A. All the work that went into splitting 4A into two divisions is now gone. I feel bad for those schools because they put in a ton of work. It doesn't really affect us because we are locked into 4A and we are right in the middle of the pack.

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

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

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

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."