

Former state champs return to Wildcat sideline – as coaches



Louisburg High School assistant football coaches Alex Gentges (left) and Kade Larson joined the Wildcat staff this season after helping Louisburg to its first state title in 2010. Gentges (class of 2011) and Larson (class of 2013) are excited to back on the sidelines when the Wildcats host Spring Hill tonight at Wildcat Stadium.

The last time Alex Gentges and Kade Larson were on the same football field together they were both wearing the purple and white of Louisburg and they were all smiles – and for good reason.

On a sunny November afternoon in 2010, Gentges and Larson started on the Wildcats' state championship team that day in Salina after Louisburg defeated Holton 24-16 to earn the school's first, and only, state football title.

The two then went their separate ways, only to be reunited about eight years later. The two Louisburg High grads will be putting on the purple and white again and standing on the Wildcat sideline – this time as coaches.

Gentges and Larson were hired as assistants for the Wildcat program in the offseason and both players are happy to be back coaching their alma mater.

"I'm extremely excited to be back in a community that has given me so much," Gentges said. "I always talked about possibly teaching and coaching in Louisburg, but I didn't know it would happen so soon. I truly feel blessed and I'm glad everything fell into place the way it did."

It was much of the same for Larson, who had just graduated from the University of Tennessee-Martin, before he was hired to teach seventh-grade math at Louisburg Middle School. Gentges, who recently graduated from Pittsburg State, teaches physical education at LMS.

"I am extremely excited to be back coaching at Louisburg," Larson said. "I really hoped the opportunity would present itself and it just so happened to. I was lucky enough to be hired at LMS and am glad I am able to be coaching football."

Both were fixtures on the Wildcat state championship team. Larson, who was a sophomore at the time, started on the line, while Gentges was a starting linebacker and running back.

So when both were hired as teachers in the district, the opportunity to add them to the coaching ranks at LHS made too much sense for Louisburg head coach Robert Ebenstein. Gentges and Larson join currently assistants Jeff Lohse and Drew Harding as LHS alums that are on the staff.

"It is invaluable having those two back with this program, especially when you consider the success they had going through the same workouts, in the same weight room, and on the same field," Ebenstein said. "Then you put coach Lohse and coach Harding into that same conversation as people who graduated from Louisburg and have chosen to come back here. It definitely says something about this town and the tradition that this program has."

"I was fortunate enough to coach Kade when he was a senior and I know the type of player and person he was. When Alex was hired here, I spoke with Griff (former coach Gary Griffin) and

Jeff about him, and once I spoke with them I could not wait to get him on the coaching staff. These two will hopefully be here for a long time and our students athletes will greatly benefit from having these guys in their corner.”

Larson, who played collegiate football at the University of Tennessee-Martin, is currently working with the offensive and defensive lines and is a freshman defensive coach. Gentges, who played football at Hutchinson Community College, along with throwing the javelin at Pittsburg State, is a junior varsity assistant and also coaches running backs and linebackers.

With all the success that both had in high school, they believe they can pass what they’ve learned on down to the current generation and continue the Louisburg football tradition. Of course, winning a state championship doesn’t hurt with gaining respect from the current players.



Kade Larson celebrates with a teammate after intercepting a pass for a touchdown during the 2010 playoffs.

"I think it helps the guys a lot knowing that we have been there and done it," Larson said. "We know what it's like to go win a state championship and know that it can be done. They have one goal this year and that is to win the state championship and I feel like they see through us how much you do remember it down the road in life. I think a big thing they see through Alex and I is how much of a family the team becomes and that is a big factor in making a state championship run."

With having a former teammate around, comes a fair share of reminiscing. The two new coaches, along with coach Lohse, are the only ones still around from that state championship team.

"It's still one of the best memories I have," Gentges said. "There is nothing like experiencing something that special with all your buddies with you. The coaching staff was something that really stood out to me that year. I believe they are a big reason why I wanted to become a teacher/coach. They seemed to have a special bond with each other and I can only hope to achieve that with this group of coaches as well."

"I couldn't ask for a better coaching staff this year. They welcomed me with open arms and I'm excited to work with them. I have high expectations this year and we have a lot of potential, but like Coach E says to the players, potential doesn't win you anything...we have to go prove it."



Alex Gentges had several big carries for the Wildcats in 2010 as they went on to win a state title.

As for the season that lies ahead, both coaches are excited to get back under the Friday Night Lights and help the current players reach their goals.

“It’s hard to develop a brotherhood as strong as what you can in high school, but I enjoyed playing and I’m grateful for all the challenges I faced and overcame because it helped make me who I am today,” Gentges said. “I miss playing more than anything, but I’m living through these Louisburg athletes now and I hope I can help them get to bigger and better things.”

As much as they miss their playing days, getting the opportunity to join the Louisburg coaching staff has been a great opportunity for both.

“This staff is great,” Larson said. “There is so much football

knowledge throughout the staff. I am very excited to keep working with them. We should be a pretty solid team this year. We have a lot of returners so that means a lot of experience. I am very excited to get the season started.”

Wildcat football hoping for big season after missing playoffs



Louisburg quarterback Madden Rutherford returns as the Wildcat signal caller for his junior season after he earned second team All-Frontier League honors a season ago. The Wildcats finished 6-3 a year ago and are hoping for a big season as they return 16 starters.

The Louisburg High School football team had its fair share of successes last season as it finished with six wins under then first-year coach Robert Ebenstein.

As nice as it was, that season has bugged Ebenstein and his players the entire offseason. The Wildcats missed the playoffs by just one game and saw their campaign end in a loss to their rival, Paola.

The Wildcats have used the ending as motivation all offseason to get better. There is no mistake this time around, as Louisburg will definitely have a spot in the playoffs under the new postseason format.

All the teams on each side of the state will be seeded into a bracket by record, which will determine the matchups, starting with week nine. The format eliminates district play, which took the top two teams in each district into the playoffs.

"Honestly, 6-3 and missing the playoffs was a brutal end to the season, but our motivation is much more than just playoffs," Ebenstein said. "With the new playoff format we are looking to make a statement and that drive has to come from within and has to be present every day of weights, practice, and game days."

Games haven't started yet, but the Wildcat players have put in the work over the summer and during practice and are ready to make some noise. Louisburg returns 16 starters and also has an 18-member senior class.

That experience has given the Wildcats high expectations for themselves as they figure to be one of the favorites to win the Frontier League that includes three new teams in Tonganoxie, Piper and Bonner Springs.

"We want to win every game on our schedule and go 8-0 and we think have a chance to do that," senior captain Austin Moore said. "It is going to be a challenge, but we have been working hard. We want to win the league and then see where we get put in the playoffs. We are excited to get going."

Offensively, Louisburg had its highs and lows last season as it ran a new offense, but the Wildcats have since put those challenges behind them as they return eight starters and hope to take it to another level.

It starts with running back Austin Moore, who was a first team

All-Frontier League selection a year ago after he recorded 1,200 yards on the ground to go along with 15 touchdowns. Seniors Blue Caplinger and Brayden Gage also figured to get touches at the running back spot.

"I think Austin has the potential to have a huge year," Ebenstein said. "Off a 1,200-plus yard season last year and returning four offensive lineman, I think all of our running backs have the ability to get huge chunks every time they touch the ball."

The offensive line will be key for the Wildcats as senior Kiefer Tucker leads the group after earning honorable mention all-league honors a season ago. Senior Noah Larson returns at center, while juniors Brayden White and Garrett Harding all hope to have big years on the line.



Louisburg junior Brayden White is one of four returning starters on the Wildcat offensive line.

Louisburg does have to replace Garrett Lowry's spot a tackle from last year and it is a big hole to fill as Lowry was a first team all-league selection. Seniors Jonathan DePriest and Hunter Day, along with James Nelson and Cole Williams are all competing for the final spot.

At tight end, the Wildcats have three players competing to help out the offensive line in Michael Waldron, Eli Johnson and Andy Hupp. Josh Casey, Weston Guetterman, Beckett Rasmussen, Gabe Rader and Konnor Vohs all figure to see time at wide receiver.

Leading the offense will be second-year quarterback Madden Rutherford. The Louisburg junior, who was a second team all-league player, got a lot of experience guiding the Wildcats last season and Ebenstein has seen a lot out of his signal caller so far.

"Madden is in a position to have a breakout year," Ebenstein said. "Last year we tried to hide him a bit as a runner to let him get comfortable in that role on Friday night and to protect him from taking hits, but if you watched him grow last season he is a tough kid and runs hard.

"He is also extremely smart, almost to the point where he drives me crazy. When I am thinking through something he usually fixes it for me before the words come out of my mouth. His understanding of this offense makes my job calling plays a lot easier."



(From left): Austin Moore, Noah Larson and Kiefer Tucker team up on a tackle last season.

On defense, Moore is the quarterback of that group at middle linebacker as he returns to lead the eight starters on that side of the ball. Moore racked up 70 tackles last season to go along with five sacks and two forced fumbles.

It is a defense that Moore takes a lot of pride in and he believes it can be a strength this season.

"I think the defense will be strong as usual, and I think it will be stronger than last year because we are bringing back so many people," Moore said. "I know the linebackers are going to be young, but (Jorge) LeBron is going to step up and Hupp is going to be there too and he is a really good player. It will be a good defense."

The Wildcats returns three starting linemen in Tucker, Larson

and Harding. Tucker was a second team all-league defensive player last year and Larson was an honorable mention.

DePriest, White, Day, Brian Houck, James Foote and Johnson are all vying for playing time on the defensive line as well.

Louisburg is young, experience-wise, at linebacker alongside Moore. Hupp, LeBron, along with Ben Wiedenmann, Dylan Knipp and Jay Scollin are all competing for the other spots.

Caplinger and Gage bring a lot of experience to the secondary as both were honorable mention all-league players last season. Waldron, Rasmussen, Rader, Guetterman, Brandon Cooper and Tanner Belcher also figure to see playing time in the back of the defense.

As much talent as the Wildcats have returning, it is their willingness to work hard that has Ebenstein excited about the season more than anything.

"I think our strength as a team is our stubborn hard-nosed attitudes," Ebenstein said. "We have a lot of kids who are just football guys. It's something you can't really explain, but when you watch them play they just get it. As coaches, if we skip dirty chutes and dig drill, the kids are asking what is going on because they look forward to those physical drills where 'football guys' shine.

"Another strength of this team is how the kids and coaches truly enjoy each other's company. I have been a part of others where when practice ends it's almost a race of who can get off the field the fastest. With this group, practice ends and it almost seems that kids and coaches just linger around and keep playing catch, having kicking contests or whatever it may be on that day."

The season is almost upon them as Louisburg will host Spring Hill at 7 p.m., Friday at Wildcat Stadium as they hope it is a start to what is a special year.

"I'm really excited for Friday," Moore said. "We have all been waiting for this day for a long time. We will be ready."

New rules create different vibe for first day of fall practice



The Louisburg High School football team opened the 2018 season with its first day of practice Monday and did so under different guidelines. Despite that, the Wildcats are excited for the start of the season.

On the horizon, it looked like a normal first day of practice.

More than 150 athletes took to their respective field, court or course to begin their journey to greatness Monday for the 2018 fall sports season. Excitement was abound and coaches were happy to be back with their players.

However, the first day of practice was a little bit different this year as the Kansas High School Activities Association implemented new fall heat acclimation rules in late July. The rules, applied to all sports, includes:

- Only one practice per day is permitted during the first

five days of practice. All individuals shall only practice once per day for the first five days the individual practices, no matter when the person joins the team or if the person misses days due to injury/illness.

- No single practice may last longer than three hours. All warm-up, stretching, conditioning and weight lifting is included as part of the three-hour limit.
- A separate walkthrough is permitted in addition to the single practice. The walkthrough cannot be longer than one hour and must be separated from practice by at least three hours of rest. A walkthrough is defined as a teaching opportunity with the athletes in which no protective equipment is worn. No physically exerting activity, including any conditioning or weight lifting, may take place during the walkthrough.
- Beginning on practice day six, double practice sessions are permitted for any individual who has completed five days of single practices. Double practice sessions cannot be held on consecutive days. The day following a double practice day would be either a single practice day or a rest/recovery day.
- On days of multiple practices, no single practice may last longer than 3 hours and total practice time combined shall not exceed five hours.
- To be deemed a practice, a majority of the squad members must participate in the organized team training session.

Those rules left most of the coaches at Louisburg High School having to readjust how they run their practices or tryouts.

The Wildcat boys soccer team, which normally conditioned in the morning and worked on skills in the afternoon, were forced to cram everything into one practice.

"I am extremely frustrated with the new KSHSAA rule," Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley said. "Before to protect the student athletes, we ran in the morning before the sun was

up and when it was cooler out. Now we have to practice and condition in the afternoon in the heat of the day. Personally, I fill this will lead to more issues. It would be interesting to see who all was included in this decision and what the data said.”



Eli Minster passes a ball to a teammate during a drill Monday during the first official day of practice.

Louisburg volleyball, which also holds tryouts, had to split up the grade levels during the process. Senior and juniors had tryouts in the morning as a group, while sophomores and freshman practiced in the afternoon.

“In the past, we were able to put every athlete, freshman through senior, on the court at the same time and separate out the tested areas,” Louisburg volleyball coach Jessica Compliment said. “Physical testing had been in the morning

with volleyball skill testing in the afternoon. Due to the change in the rule, we could no longer use that set up.

“It has forced a ‘split’ in the athletes because they can’t all work out together like they have been all summer long. Because of our numbers, and the tests we feel are necessary in order to make cuts and squad roster decisions, we need to run the athletes through each test. We would not have enough time to do that if we had kept them all together and brought them in for only one session. Which means the athletes are that more anxious and excited to finish tryouts and start the season with their teammates.”

There were also specific rule changes in regards to football, which forced Wildcat coach Robert Ebenstein to adjust his practice schedule as well, including the removal of two-a-days for the first week practice. Other changes include:

- Players must have a minimum of one day of rest/recovery during any week (Sunday- Saturday). Only injury treatments are permitted on a rest/recovery day.
- Days No. 1 and 2 of practice: Helmets only (air and bags only are permitted.)
- Days No. 3 and 4: Helmets and shoulder pads are permitted (Day 3: control permitted; Day 4: thud permitted.)
- Days 5 through Saturday of third week of practice: Full contact (air, bags, control, thud and live action permitted) may begin with exceptions that on any day involving multiple practices, only one practice may involve thud and/or live action.

“The changes with KSHSAA policies are what they are,” Ebenstein said. “I think they were created with good intentions. Personally I feel that our practice tendencies over the last few years have put player safety as the No. 1 priority always, so in that regard not a whole lot will change for us. You are allowed to do a separate ‘walk-through’ other

than practice which we will still do every morning at 6 a.m., so we still have that old school two-a-day feeling just the approach of what we do and how we will do it has changed.

“The only thing that confused me is the purpose of the change is for heat acclimation, but the wording of it will force us to condition our players in the afternoon when it is hot instead of in the morning when it is typically cooler. But most all of our players have been working their tails off all summer and are already in pretty good shape.”

Despite the changes in practice, all four Wildcat programs are excited for what their season has in store. LHS had a large number of participants for the first day of fall practice as 163 athletes participated.

Ebenstein had 70 players attend the first day of practice, which is the highest number the Wildcats have had since he joined the staff in 2012. Louisburg also hopes to improve off its 6-3 record last season as they return 18 seniors, including several starters on both sides of the ball.

“Practice went well and it was good to finally get back on the field with the guys,” Ebenstein said. “We are very excited for this season, as in every team in the state. The thing that separates us is how players, managers and coaches alike all really enjoy our time together. I am excited to coach, but I’m honestly excited to be around these coaches and kids again and give this season the best run we can.”



LHS freshmen and sophomore volleyball players gather at center court during tryouts Monday.

On the volleyball side, the Lady Cats had 34 athletes show up for the first day of tryouts, which will end on Wednesday as Louisburg begins its quest to get back to the state tournament after finishing second a year ago.

“The first couple days are focused on running each athlete through a set of volleyball skills and physical skills tests,” Compliment said. “The athletes did a good job for the first day, and we are looking forward to the next couple of days.

“Over the course of the summer, we had a lot of athletes participate in summer league matches, summer camps, team camps, open gym and weights. They are ready to get the season going. There is a lot of excitement among the athletes and a lot of anticipation for the season.”

Coming off a spot in the state quarterfinals, the Wildcat boys soccer team had 38 athletes compete for a spot on the team as they try to make another run in the playoffs.

“It was nice to see so many kids out for the team,” Conley said. “The boys work incredibly hard and we very supportive of each other. With having so many new players coming out for the team, we did a lot of teaching and developing expectations for the drills and why we do things. It was actually the first time in three years the majority of the team completed the mile under six minutes, which was fantastic.

“It is a great time of the year with a lot of optimism. The boys were very upbeat and very focused on getting better. With only four seniors, we are extremely young and we will need to do a lot of teaching.”



Trinity Moore (center) leads a pack of runners during the first day of practice Monday at LHS.

As for cross country, numbers have dwindled a little for head coach John Reece as he has close to 25 runners out this season, but he has a good group of runners coming back, including state medalist Trinity Moore.

The girls team is also hoping to make a return trip to state this season after qualifying for the first time in school history last year.

“The first practice was great,” Reece said. “We are going to have more girls than boys, but it seems like they are in shape and ready to start training for our first race.

“The kids are jazzed about the season and the girls are wanting to do even better than last year. I believe success builds the team numbers.”

Hinkle ready to take on role as LHS activities director



Walking into Scott Hinkle’s office, it doesn’t appear he started a new job two weeks ago.

The moving boxes are mostly gone. His desk is organized with everything in its place, along with a calendar crammed full of upcoming events.

Hinkle is not shy to tell people about his love for the Boston Red Sox. Sitting on one wall are two older chairs from Fenway Park, along other memorabilia.

The one thing that Hinkle hasn't caught up on is his efforts to get some purple gear. An avid Kansas Jayhawk fan, he hasn't had need to purchase any purple flair in the past. Seems like that will change shortly as he was hired as the new activities director and assistant principal at Louisburg High School earlier this summer.

"I have been a Jayhawk fan all my life," Hinkle said. "It will be a little weird to wear purple that is for sure, but I am sure I will get used to it. Before I left my old job, people found out where I was going so they started giving me little gifts with purple on it, like markers and stuff like that. They definitely got a kick out of that."

Hinkle takes over for Jeremy Holloway, who was promoted to principal at LHS and becomes the third activities director in as many years to take over that spot.

"My wife has family in Kansas City and I have family in Wichita and so we were looking to come this way," Hinkle said. "I had a couple friends that told me that the Louisburg position had opened up. I had heard of Louisburg a long time ago. I actually coached at Ottawa University in the early 90s and was familiar with the area. I came up, interviewed and here I am. It has obviously worked out well."

"Everyone has been so helpful and friendly and it is a good time to be coming to Louisburg. I am excited to be here."

Before taking the job in Louisburg, Hinkle had spent the last 22 years in the Liberal school district in a variety of roles. He served as the boys high school basketball coach, along with nine years as an activities director, a year as the head girls basketball coach at the local community college and last year he served as assistant principal at the high school.

Hinkle graduated from Valley Center High School, and went on from there to earn his bachelor's degree from Friends University, where he played basketball, and his master's from the University of Kansas.

Basketball has always been a passion for Hinkle, but during his time as activities director at Liberal, he had a chance to learn the life of other sports as well.

"Liberal changed a lot from when I first got there in the mid 90s when they were a football and track powerhouse," Hinkle said. "There were just athletes galore, but the culture kind of changed. We were really good in soccer and decent in track and volleyball. We still had good kids and good athletes, but it was a big transition as far as sports go when I first got there. My kids grew up there and being involved and being able to watch their events was something that has always appealed to me.

"Basketball has always been in my blood. Other than my nine years as athletic director, I have coached in some capacity and I am a big basketball fan. Obviously, being an athletic director I am just a big sports fan in general."

Still new in town, Hinkle is still trying to get to know his coaching staff, but he is excited about the situation he is walking into with the Wildcats finishing as state runner-ups in volleyball and girls soccer last season. Several cross country, golf, wrestling and track athletes also earned state medals.

However, if there is one thing he wanted to relay to everyone is that he wants to give his coaches the freedom to run their programs.

"I want to let the coaches, coach," he said. "I am not going to be the guy that says this is how we did things in Liberal and I am not that type of leader. If it comes to the point where they need some advice, I want to be a resource for them.

I don't want to be someone that is looking for something.

"I have met a few of the coaches. I have let them know that I am here if they need anything. I have stopped by the weight room to speak to a few coaches and some have stopped by to introduce themselves. I am still learning names and faces. We have a coaches meeting on the 10th and I will see and learn a lot more about them then."

With all the success the Wildcats had last season in the sports arena, Hinkle is happy to be a part of the LHS family and is learning new things about the town every day.

"I have heard all types of things," he said. "I have heard they take football pretty seriously here. I know they were state runner-up in volleyball and girls soccer last year and that is an exciting thing to walk into. I think expectations are obviously high in those sports, but I think everyone always has high expectations. I am not going to do anything different than normal and I am just going to sit back and observe for a while and take it all in."

Hinkle will experience some different things along with his new position. This season, the Frontier League will welcome three new teams – Bonner Springs, Piper and Tonganoxie – and will say goodbye to De Soto.

Another big change will be the postseason formats with several sports as the Kansas State High School Activities Association reshuffled their classification system, eliminating Class 4A-Division II.

"With the changes in the league, the classification system and being a new AD, it is probably a good time to be coming on," Hinkle said. "The learning curve is going to be the same for all of us."

"I walked into a good situation for scheduling because (Holloway) already had everything all taken care of," he said.

“I think the dynamics of the league are going to change. Liberal’s former girls basketball coach is the coach at Piper and I know a little bit about them. As far as the programs and rivalries, that is something that is going to come with time.”

Even with all the changes in his life – moving, starting a new job, getting to know new faces – Hinkle is ready for what lies ahead and the staff at Louisburg has helped with that transition.

“It has been a whirlwind and it has been information overload,” he said. “It is a lot of the same things I did in Liberal as athletic director, I just haven’t done it for the last five years. Being an assistant principal at Liberal last year, I think, helped me prepare for the principal side.

“People have just gone out of their way to be helpful. From the administration to the custodial staff to the secretaries, everyone has been super helpful. When I was out around town, people have welcomed me and it has been a friendly feel everywhere I have been.”

Wildcats hope summer work pays dividends in fall



Running back Austin Moore breaks free from a Prairie View defender thanks to a block from teammate Brayden White during

Louisburg's scrimmage with the Buffalos in June.

In his first season as the Louisburg High School head football coach, the 2017 campaign was a successful one for Robert Ebenstein.

Ebenstein helped guide the Wildcats to a 6-3 record on the season, and did so while implementing many different aspects to the Louisburg program. However, the one part that left a bad taste in the Wildcats' mouth was the fact they missed the playoffs by one game.

Louisburg finished with a 1-2 record in district play and the Wildcats are hoping for a different outcome in 2018. To make sure that doesn't happen again, the Wildcat coaches and players went right to work at the beginning of June and haven't let up.

"To say our guys are pumped for the season to get here is an understatement," Ebenstein said. "Returning eight starters on both sides of the ball, with a lot of kids pushing for those positions, has made for a very committed and competitive off season. Being 6-3 last season and missing the playoffs has left us with a terrible feeling.

"We have some pretty high season goals and expectations, and our guys have been backing those goals with their weights attendance and efforts. With our high goals our guys have stayed grounded, and understand that right now we are just looking at beating Spring Hill on August 31."



Louisburg head coach Robert Ebenstein talks to his team prior to a scrimmage last month.

The Wildcats do return several starters from last season as they try to make a run at a Frontier League title, which will have a little different look to it. Gone from the league is De Soto, and the Frontier will welcome three new teams in Piper, Tonganoxie and Bonner Springs.

Adding those extra teams will make winning the league even more difficult, but Ebenstein has liked what he has seen from his group so far this summer, especially in the weight room. Louisburg also had a pair of scrimmages to go along with their team camp.

“Like always were are putting our focus on our summer weights program,” Ebenstein said. “Our weights program is as tough as any other program in the state both physically and mentally. Besides weights, we had our camp, review sessions

through June and two 'jamboree' sessions. Our first session was against Olathe West and Prairie View and our second session was against Basehor-Linwood and Prairie View."

At this time a year ago, Ebenstein and the Wildcats spent most of the summer instituting a new offense. Now, they are able to take it a step further and the players have even taken in upon themselves to get better.



Louisburg senior Noah Larson reaches out to bring down an Olathe West runner during the team's scrimmage in June.

Instead of organized 7-on-7 activities, players got together on their own every Sunday evening to go through workouts. The Wildcats also used the team camp to fine tune their offense as they had more than 60 athletes out for the week-long session.

"Overall the coaching staff thought that camp went really well," Ebenstein said. "As a team we are far more advanced

compared to where we were a year ago in our understanding of concepts and assignments.

“This year we already had the basic concept of the offense installed so we were able to go back and focus on the details. We were able to focus on technique that will allow us to be even better. Last year we were spinning mentally at times with terminology and concepts, this year being able to focus on the small things and perfect our steps, hand placement and timing will be very beneficial in the long run.”

Moore named Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year



No matter the sport, Austin Moore didn't back down from a challenge and it was evident whenever he took to the field, the wrestling mat or a track runway.

Moore was an all-league and all-state player on the football field, found himself one victory away from a state wrestling medal and improved throughout the season in the javelin.

It was his success in those athletic avenues that earned him the 2018 Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year honor.

The award, which is in its first year, is to recognize an outstanding Louisburg High School student athlete. Louisburg

Sports Zone asked the head coaches at LHS to submit nominations and those nominations were then organized and submitted back to the coaches for a vote.

The coaches then submitted their top three choices and the number of votes were added up, which decided the winner.

On the football team, Moore was named a 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, a junior, 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. 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.

"Austin is a great leader and is always looking to improve himself and his game," Louisburg football coach Robert Ebenstein said. "He is an extremely dedicated athlete to the program, but the most impressive thing about him is how he puts the team before himself all the time. Austin is not a real vocal kid, but actions speak louder than words and Austin is always leading by example."



Pictured (from left) is Louisburg boys track coach Andy Wright, football head coach Robert Ebenstein, Austin Moore and Wildcat wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird.

On the wrestling mat, he was also a team captain where he earned a 43-7 record and eclipsed the 100 career win mark. Moore was a state qualifier at 195 pounds and was a regional runner-up to go along with a Frontier League title. He won the team's Workhorse Award and set a program record with 38 pins. Moore also had the highest GPA on the team.

"Austin has been a pivotal part of our team's success since he joined us as a freshman," Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird said. "He has a phenomenal work ethic in the practice room, and he is a relentless warrior in competitions. He knows how to set goals and pursue them with all his heart. He doesn't panic in adverse situations and he finds a way to prevail. No one wants to wrestle him twice. He's all about competitiveness, dedication, improvement and honor."

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.

With all he accomplished during the 2017-18 season, Moore will

get another crack at it all when he competes for the Wildcats in his senior season.

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 be 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's 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.

Doles excited for next step with Ottawa football



Louisburg senior Desmond Doles had a good season for the Wildcat football program and it translated to an opportunity with the Ottawa University football program this fall.

Just two years ago, Desmond Doles was nowhere to be found on a football field.

After playing football as a freshman, he decided to take a break from the sport as a sophomore and focus his energy on other things.

“That turned out to be a big mistake,” Doles said.

Still, Doles learned from his miscue and went back out his junior season and fell in love with the sport. It turned out to be a good decision, because after a good senior year with the Wildcat program, Doles is ready to continue his career on the gridiron at the collegiate level.

Doles made it official on Feb. 14 when he signed his letter of intent, in front of family and friends at Louisburg High School, to play for Ottawa University.

It was a difficult decision for Doles as he had another offer to walk-on at Emporia State, a Division II program, but he felt Ottawa was going to be a better fit.

“My dad went there when I was first born and he played basketball there,” Doles said. “So we were all familiar with the scene at Ottawa. We got more information about it and it turned out to be a pretty good school. It was a tough decision because I had two schools that I wanted to go to, but I felt I was more wanted at Ottawa and would be more successful playing for the Braves.”



Desmond Doles signed his letter of intent to play football for Ottawa University on Feb. 14. Desmond is seated next to his parents Desiree and Bryan, along with his brother Brandon. Standing (from left) is Louisburg head football coach Robert Ebenstein and Ottawa offensive coordinator Curran White.

Doles played wide receiver and defensive back for the Wildcats and earned honorable mention all-Frontier League honors on both sides of the ball. He was the team's leading receiver with 284 yards through the air with five touchdowns.

On defense, Doles also finished with a team-high three interceptions to go along with 29 tackles. However, it is on offense where Doles plans to take the next step in college.

"Ottawa is more of a passing team and they said I would fit right in as a receiver and be able to help them," he said. "They didn't have the personnel they would have liked last year and they had a couple guys down that are going to be back

this year and I think there are a lot of components that will make Ottawa really good next year. They got a new strength and conditioning coach and guys got stronger during the season, and I think the program looks very bright.”

The Ottawa coaches also made a big impact on Doles and his decision to join a Braves program that finished with a 3-8 record a season ago. The Braves, under head coach Kent Kessinger, hope to take a step forward in the coming season as he has taken his program to the NAIA Championship Series six times.

“Coach K (Kessinger) is an awesome guy,” Doles said. “He is super energetic and loves what he does. I really like that about him. He was just really interested in me and I felt wanted. I really like the coaching staff and they are all nice and super excited to have me.”

As excited as Doles is to start his collegiate career, he knows playing football in Louisburg helped him grow as a player.

“My junior year, I got to see the field for varsity and I didn’t think that I would get to,” he said. “I just loved playing with those group of seniors. Even though it was mainly a run offense, it was still fun to be able to go outside and be considered a skinny offensive lineman as some wide receivers are called. This year we started throwing the ball more and it just made it so much more fun. It was a lot of fun.

“When I get to Ottawa, my goal is to just get stronger and faster. I want to work on coordination and footwork and being the best that I can be.”

Injury sidelines Griffin for rest of season



New Orleans tight end Garrett Griffin was placed on injured reserve today by the Saints. Griffin, a Louisburg High School graduate, caught his first NFL pass last week in the team's regular season finale.

Less than a week after catching his first pass in the National Football League, Garrett Griffin's season has come to a close with the New Orleans Saints.

The Saints announced today that they have placed Griffin on injured reserve, which means he is out for the rest of the season. New Orleans, the No. 4 seed in the NFC, is slated to host Carolina on Sunday in the first round of the playoffs.

Griffin, who is a 2012 Louisburg High School graduate, had been dealing with a foot injury according to reports in New Orleans and was forced to miss the Saints' game in week 16.

The Saints' tight end played the regular season finale last week in which he caught his first NFL pass – a four-yard reception. He also returned a kickoff for 12 yards in New Orleans' 31-24 loss to Tampa Bay.

Griffin was activated from the Saints' practice squad on December 2 and played in his first professional game the following day in the Saints' 31-21 win over Carolina.

He became the latest casualty on the Saints' injury list as New Orleans has had to place 19 players on injured reserve this season.

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.