

# Opinion: Griffin left his legacy on Louisburg



Louisburg football and track coach Gary Griffin said goodbye to Louisburg High School last week as he retired from the school after 32 years. Griffin won two state titles during that time and coached hundreds of athletes.

Gary Griffin is a man of few words. This is not a heavily-guarded secret. Anyone who has been in Louisburg for any amount of time knows this is the case.

So, here I am, trying to figure out what to say about a man who has sculpted and guided high schoolers for more than three decades – a man who doesn't like to talk much.

It is not an easy task, but Griff, as he is admirably known, doesn't have to say anything. His actions speak for themselves. I was able to get dozens of responses from people who wanted to say 'Thank you' to Griff for all he has done and it was fantastic. It truly shows what impact he had on the community.

To be honest, this is a column I have been dreading on writing for several years now. I respect that heck out of Griff and have since I arrived here almost 10 years ago. In the last few years, I have come to realize that his time at Louisburg High School was coming to a close.

There was a part of me where I hoped he would hold out a little longer and my kids would either have the chance to have him as a science teacher or a coach. There is no one I would trust more with my children than him.

For the last decade, I have had the chance to watch Griff reach young athletes and get the best he could out of them. If the kids wanted to put in the work, Griff would take care of the rest.

Coaches and teachers like Gary Griffin are a dying breed. You don't see them stick around for 30-plus years at the same place anymore, and ones that like to coach multiple sports. He could do it all and he did it well.

During his time as a head football coach, Griff's success was obvious. He led the Wildcats to two state championship games in his 14 years, including the school's first state title in 2010.

About seven months after that, he coached the Louisburg boys track team to another state title in 2011. Personally, it was one of the more fun times for me covering Wildcat athletics.

For years, the only state title the school had won was in golf back in 1977, but it had been close in several instances. Then in less than a year, Louisburg wins two.

As much talent as those teams had, none of those titles happen without Griff and the group of coaches he assembled around him. They all worked so well together for several years and it was impressive to watch.

To me, what was more impressive was the fact he looked at this Paola High School graduate (yes, I grew up in Paola) and trusted me to cover Wildcat athletics the right way. Louisburg and Paola has been a great rivalry for several years and I am sure the last person Griff wanted to confide in after a game was this guy from Paola.

Instead, he looked past all that, and over the years I think I earned his trust. He trusted me to censor him during interviews and make him sound good in all the articles. Not sure I succeeded every time, but I did what I could.

I've teased him that I will release all the uncensored comments he made over the years. It would be great reading for sure.

He was there for me, like so many others, two years ago when I found out I was let go from my position with the newspaper. Griff was a sounding board when I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life.

He gave me some great advice and the confidence to go ahead and start Louisburg Sports Zone. I may have never been a student of his, or an athlete, but he helped me like he did so many others over the years.

Griff commanded respect from his players and he got it. He was often gruff, liked to yell at times and held his players accountable. He had the incredible balance of being tough on athletes and caring about them at the same time.

A lot of them didn't run off and pout when he got on to them, but instead they rose to the challenge and did things they didn't think they were capable of because they didn't want to disappoint him. I watched him get after players, and when the season was over, I saw him try to hold back tears as he had to say goodbye to his senior class. He loved his players and the feeling was mutual.

There was no doubt he had chances to go off to bigger schools, but he and his family loved this town and decided to make this their home. He and his wife Lori raised two wonderful kids here and have been a big part of the community.

Behind every great coach is dedicated and loyal coach's wife. Lori has stood by him through the good and bad times and put

up with him being gone half of the year and leaving her to raise their two kids.

He would miss his kids' events because he was busy coaching someone else's children. It is a sacrifice not a lot of people are willing to make.

Griff didn't want to take the credit when things went well – he shifted that to his assistants and players. At the same time, he was the first person to stand there and take the complaints.

A coach's life is not an easy one, but Griff made it look a breeze for 32 years.

Now after years of hard work, he gets a chance to watch his own kids thrive in their lives. He will get the opportunity to watch his son Garrett find his way in the National Football League with the New Orleans Saints.

A little closer to home, he gets to see his daughter Gentry thrive in the nursing field and create a life for herself and her husband Drew Harding – who ironically will be teaching science and coaching at LHS next season.

Selfishly, it is sad Griff won't be roaming the sidelines or halls at LHS any longer. At the same time, I couldn't be happier for a man who put his heart and soul into a place and made better than when he arrived.

He put his stamp on Louisburg High School athletics and he will not be forgotten. A job well done Griff! Thanks for everything!

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# Thank you Griff....



For the last 32 years, Gary Griffin has roamed the halls and sidelines at Louisburg High School. Whether as a teacher or a coach, he has made an impact on a lot of young lives, but also colleagues and family as well.

Griffin served as the Wildcat head football coach for 14 years, along with several years as an assistant. He was the Louisburg boys basketball head coach for eight years and was either the boys or girls head track coach for 20 years.

Coach Griffin led the Wildcats to their first football state title in 2010 and the first boys track state title in 2011. He also coached several playoff runs, including as the head coach for the 2007 football team that finished as a state runner up. He was also an assistant on the state runner-up 1997 football team.

So before you totally put Louisburg High School in your rear view mirror, there are some people who wanted to say thank you for everything you have done. I will follow with my words a little later, but thanks again Coach Griff!



“We are so proud of Gary. We enjoyed watching him coach football, basketball and track at Louisburg High School. Our highlight was when he and his team won state in football. We made a lot of trips to Louisburg just to watch him coach. The Louisburg people were very good to him. He has been a great son, brother, and father and we wish him the best in anything he decides to do and know he will do it well.” – **Bob and Mary Rose Griffin, Gary’s Parents.**

“Gary, I would hope you already know how I feel... but thank you so much for being in Konnor Cook and Kody Cook’s lives – from t-ball to high school football. May your next journey be just as amazing and filled with memories.” – **Anita Cook**

“Coach Griffin, just wanted to mention how much Daniel and Kristen have enjoyed having you as a Biology teacher. I would say you were a top favorite teacher for both kids. Kristen is really going to miss you as a track coach and she has had a great time. She thinks you are absolutely hilarious and you make her want to do better – not an easy feat with that one!”  
– **Debbie Bell**

“Coach Griff, I just want to wish you well in your future endeavors. Also, I would like to thank you for everything you did for me on and off the field .You made me a better person and I really do appreciate it. Louisburg is a better place for having you in it.” – **Steven Brittingham**

“Thanks for all the Memories! Best Wishes Always!” – **Karen Williams**

“Great teacher and great memories from A&P.” – **Karmen DeGraeve**

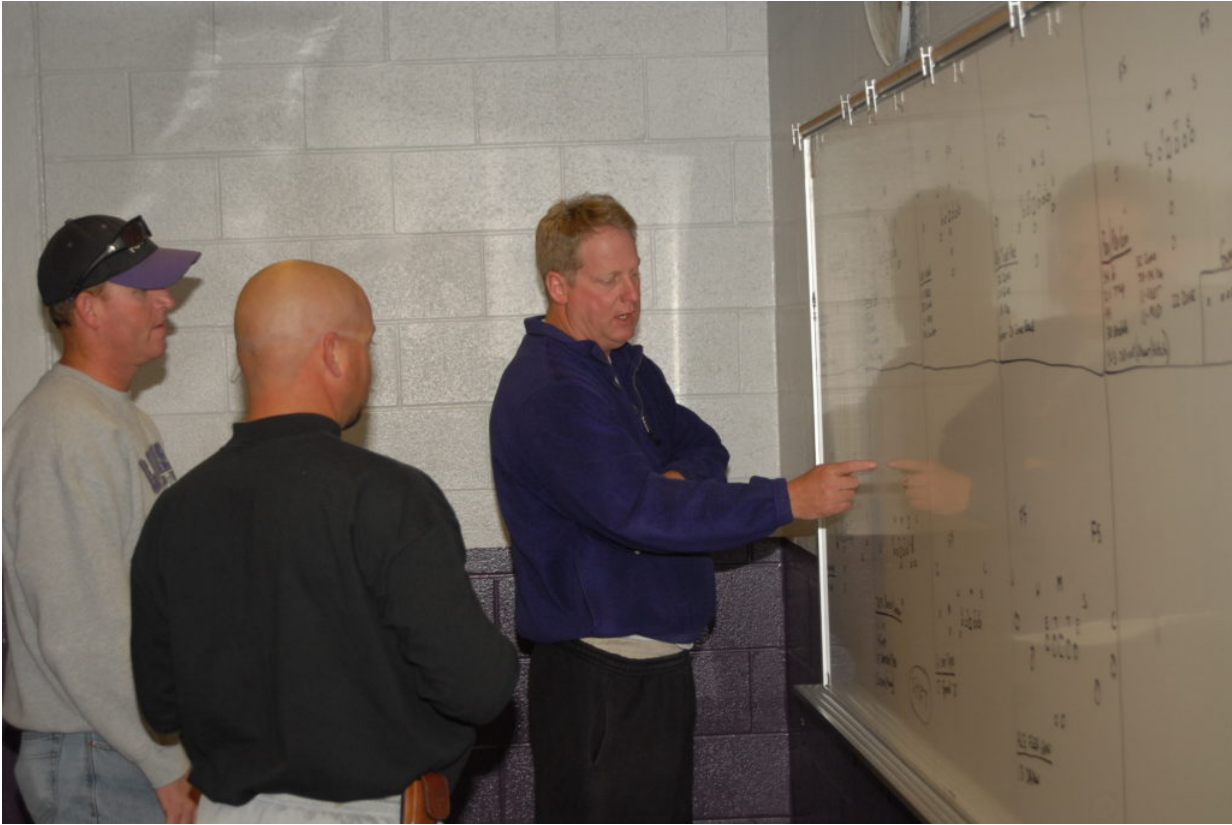
“Last year I walked into LHS for the first time since 1998. Working as a staff member I was happy to see an old familiar face (Mind you – He does NOT age) and how strange to be working with one of my old high school teachers.

“I frequently had flashbacks to being a 16 year old sitting in his class dissecting that frog, or video days, or even seeing a test question I saw many, many years ago (when helping my current students.) Wow. How time has flown by and changed.

“Some things change but great teachers and coaches do not. You have impacted so many athletes and students. You will leave behind a legacy and memory too many at LHS and your shoes will

be impossible to fill.

“Congratulations on sticking it out! You made it! Enjoy your retirement, your family and all their accomplishments. Wishing you the best!” – **Jamie (Manson) Ballard, Class of 1998.**



“I wanted to share a few memories of my time around Gary at Louisburg High.

“The greatest lesson he ever taught me...We were supposed to use the restroom during lunch and I came back to biology and immediately asked to use the restroom. He said yes (to my surprise) so I set my double chocolate chip muffin down on my desk and left. I came back to the whole class laughing and Griff licking his fingers. He had stuck his thumb right down the center of the muffin. He said “If you had gone to the bathroom during lunch, this wouldn’t have happened.” And I never made that mistake again.

He also repeatedly told kids if they wanted to be successful they should ‘do the opposite of Emily and you will be amazing



in life.' He was hilarious, real, smart, and sarcastic...and it was awesome. I look up to him as an educator.

On a more serious note...I grew up around Gentry and Garrett so I also grew up around Griff as well. He was the type of coach (I had him in track) that demanded your attention. I was scared to not do as he asked in fear of losing his respect. Now, as a teacher and coach, that demeanor is something I only dream to possess one day.

I wish him luck in this part of his life! Congratulations!" – **Emily Lemke, Class of 2011**

"Coach Griffin, best wishes as you move on to new challenges. Louisburg High, and the Frontier League, will be forever impacted because of your work as a teacher, coach and positive role model. I have always appreciated your honesty and candor. You knew where you stood with you – no deception or pettiness. Good luck and God bless." – **Mike Dumpert, Paola Football**

"Thanks coach... You've done a great job with my kids and all the others... congrats on joining the retirement club..."- **David Johns**

"Nothing but the best to Coach Griffin! Cheers to you!!" – **Bryan Frank**

"One of the very best both on and off the field. Proud that you have had a positive influence on all 3 of my boys." – **Connie Ewy**



“One of the best things that ever happened to Louisburg High School. Congrats Coach Griff!” – **Doug Richardson**

“Griff, I just want to thank you for doing your part in this community helping mold me, my brothers, my father, and the seemingly million other people you’ve connected with during your tenure at LHS. It was a true blessing to be coached (yelled at), mentored, and taught by you. I’m thankful our families were in close proximity because some of my favorite memories are shared with your two children. So thank you, congratulations, and good luck!” – **Justin ‘Bobby’ ‘Waterhead’ O’Brien**

“Having worked with Griff for the past 20 years, there are too many stories, too many memories, too many things I have learned from Gary to compile into a simple response. So I will simply say, thanks for being a colleague, mentor and most of all a good friend who has always there to offer support, advise or to simply listen. Thank you for everything you have done for me over the last 20 years. Good luck to you and your future endeavors. You will be greatly missed. Oh and by the way, I still hate 57 JET.” – **Darin Gagnebin, LHS Activities Director and former assistant football coach**

“Gary, I will miss most of all Sunday night game planning and the numerous talks we’ve had in the coaches office throughout the years. Good luck and God Bless!” – **Kyle Littrell, former LHS head and assistant football coach**

“Good luck and best wishes to a great coach and very nice person!!” – **Connie Dodson**

“Thank you so much for impacting my life in such a positive way. You are a huge reason why I decided to be a teacher and a coach” – **Alex Gentges, Class of 2011**

“Congrats Gary. You did a tremendous job!” – **Kate Sperfslage**

“He was the best teacher I’ve ever had.” – **Hannah Nelson**

“Congratulations and Best Wishes Gary, enjoy retirement!” – **Laura Gleason Roeder, Frankfort**



"I am an old friend that grew up with Gary. We started out playing summer baseball together and in junior high we started to form a friendship through sports. Gary was a year older than me so I looked up to him as a big brother. From junior high through high school, we formed a great friendship. We played together for two years on the varsity basketball and football teams at Frankfort High. There were some great games that we played in. One of the biggest was my junior and his senior year.

Frankfort had just switched leagues from the Blue Valley league to the Nemaha Valley league. Baileyville had been having a great run and were almost a shoe in every year to win it in football and basketball. We went to Baileyville on a Friday night and we were both rated at the top in the state

and both undefeated. This game was being talked about all over the county and state. I'll never forget the excitement in the air or the size of the crowd on both sidelines that night. People from all over had come to watch this showdown. The game played up to its hype. We would score and then they would and there were great plays made on both sides. Finally Baileyville took the lead from us late in the first half. There wasn't much time and coach called Gary's number and he ran a great route and even though they knew it was coming our QB made a great throw and Gary made the catch we knew he would and outran everyone to the end zone. That play put us back on top and gave us the momentum to keep the lead and win the greatest game that I was ever involved in.

Gary was always a leader and a coach on the field or court. I remember my sophomore year in basketball and he pulled me aside like he always did and he said Jay you need to shoot the ball more. He told me my shooting percentage was too high and I wasn't shooting enough. Most kids would be thinking just get me the ball and not considering the team. I remember thinking back about Gary, I never had a doubt if he decided to be a coach someday that he would make a great one. There are many more stories about Gary Griffin but this one is one of my favorites." – **Jay Hiltgen, Frankfort**

"Congrats Griff!

Who would have thought when we met back in mid 80's, both basically snout nosed coaches you would become a legend for all our kids who have come through your programs. Basketball, football and track, you have become legendary!! So many lives you've touched in the classroom and athletic fields. So many you have saved from going down that "bad road". We've had many coaches who have helped so many over years and years of my life in Louisburg but your right there at the top with them all! Proud to call you a great friend! Been through a lot.

You're one of the greats my man!! Good luck!!" – **Doug Bowes**

"Griff – Some of my best memories from high school were in your class. Thanks for always making it fun. Your sarcasm cannot be matched! Hope you have a fun and relaxing retirement. You deserve it." – **Katie Haas, Class of 2004**

"Coach Griffin,

Though it has been many years I wanted to thank you, like many of my classmates before and after me, for the contribution you made to my life. You do not know it but I still often recall the life lessons I learned from you and I thought I should share one of those. Perseverance! I will say that I took great pride in you calling on me during basketball practice. I knew I would never be a 'starter' but felt that you knew who to turn to when you needed heart! You were instrumental in teaching me about coming back from my knee injury, and though it would happen a second time, the conversation about giving up the sport would teach me so much more. In that moment it was not about giving up basketball, it was about building character, patience, and adapting to continuing to help my team through personal struggle.

You know, it happened again in college? I had received a golf scholarship and needed another surgery. At that point when I had to talk to my collegiate coach I said I would be back. I had been through it before. I did just that. Though I feel I never returned to my full athletic capability I became a mentor to my peers. In those moments, in life moments, to this day I still reflect on the impact you made. You have touched so many lives, and you may not remember those exact moments, but always know I will.

Thank you, happy retirement!" – **Jon Xenos, Class of 2003**





“Quite simply, Coach Griff is one of my favorite people from Louisburg. I am so happy for all the success he had as a coach (and teacher and father). But he would probably tell you he had success as a coach when he quit having to coach ‘athletes like me’ and got to coach some kids with actual talent.

“I know I was on his first freshman basketball team that fall. Griff was also my position coach in football. Looking back, I just really looked up to Coach. He was so young and related so well to all of his players. He was never a yeller. He’d get irritated with you from time to time, but for the most part, he was calm and used humor so well to help get his points across. You really wanted to play hard for Coach Griff because you liked him so much. I wasn’t a good player or anything, but he instilled a great deal of confidence in me personally. Just a really great guy. He impacted so many lives in the Louisburg community. I am very proud of him and very happy for all his success.

“I remember when Garrett (his son) was born. I think it was my senior year. But it’s crazy how much present-day Garrett looks

like what I remember Coach Griffin looking like when he came to Louisburg. So happy for all Garrett's success and I know the pride Coach takes in his success.

"One funny story I still remember is Coach getting embarrassed in the classroom. He was my sophomore biology teacher and I remember how embarrassed he'd get when we had to cover human sexuality. His face would get bright red and then all the kids would start laughing and that would make him even more embarrassed. Griff was the kind of teacher you could mess with and he would flip you (stuff) back and you just felt like you were friends. You definitely respected him, but it wasn't really an authority figure relationship, it was more like a big brother. Honestly, that's a perfect way to describe Coach Griff. He's been a Big Brother to hundreds, maybe thousands, of kids through the years.

"Even though I haven't talked to Coach in probably at least five years, I want to express to him how much he meant to me and still does to this day. Congrats on the retirement and thanks for all you've done to make Louisburg a better place."  
– **Scott Cruce, Class of 1993**

"The thing I remember about Griff is that he treated me well on the basketball court even though I was the worst player on the team. I was lucky enough to go to a high school that didn't have cuts, so I made the teams, but didn't play a whole lot. Griff worked with me and made me a better player, even though he probably knew that I wouldn't be on the court much during games. That has always meant a lot to me, especially now that I'm older and coach kids myself.

A good story about Coach Griff. When I was a junior and on junior varsity, we had kind of a riff with some of the varsity players. It built up during the year and was at a boiling point when we were playing at an away game. After the JV game,



we were headed back into the locker room and one of my friends on varsity told me to be careful because the other varsity players had put shampoo in our shoes and boxers and stuff. After I checked and saw it was true, I made a beeline out of the locker room and was going to drag one of the varsity players out of the layup line and kick his (butt). Griff saw where I was headed and intervened. He calmed me down and then told me 'Payback is hell.' So I went back in and all of the JV players emptied their shampoo bottles into pretty much anything we could find of the guilty varsity players. We all ended up running a lot at practice the following day, but Griffin saved me from making a fool of myself in front of a lot of people." – **Colby Jones, Class of 1992**



"I have coached with Griff, in one sport or another, for 19 years now. I had the privilege of playing football and basketball for him when I was in high school. You could guarantee that any team he coached was going to play hard and

play the game the right way. He is a very modest man and doesn't like being in the limelight, but has many accomplishments in the classroom and on the field.

Gary and his wife (Lori) raised two wonderful kids, Gentry and Garrett, who both emulate their same morals and values. Griff has not only been a coach and a mentor to me, but I also consider him to be a great friend as well. It is going to be different not seeing him around here next year, but I wish him nothing but the best as he continues this next phase of his career." – **Jeff Lohse, LHS assistant football coach and former student**

"While I obviously wasn't on the football team, I did have him in class and he's still one of my favorites. Coach Griffin, I wish you nothing but the best of luck. Thank you for being such an amazing teacher. You're one of the greatest ever!

My favorite memories from being in his class all revolve around his dry sense of humor and him making fun of me basically every day. Additionally, I had class with one of my best friends and whenever we/others in class were talking too much he wouldn't even say anything, he'd just give us 'the look' and everyone would know to shut up. Haha! I can still picture it today. Only Griff can silence a room of high school students with no words.

He was a lot of fun to have as a teacher (even though he'd probably prefer to think he made us miserable. Lol!" – **Jaden Scott**

"Congratulations coach Griffin! Many years ago, when you would actually practice with the team, you were a positive influence to us all as you have been for many other student athletes over the years. Best wishes on your next chapter and hope you

can enjoy some well-deserved time for yourself.” – **Jamie Waite, Class of 1992**

“Gary, Congratulations on your retirement. You will be missed at the school and on all the teams you coached. I am glad I was able to have your guidance in the classroom and in sports. It was a fun time for me when you were coaching and teaching. Thanks for everything.” – **Dennis Seck**

“Coach Griffin, I want to first congratulate you on a wonderful career at Louisburg High School. Thank you for the lessons taught, kids guided, discipline instilled and being a mentor and father figure to many. Thank you for coaching Will in football and track. He has respected you and I appreciate all the things you have taught him. I pray for you and your family that you are blessed with a great ‘retirement’ from LHS. Thank you again and congratulations on a terrific career here in Louisburg! Best Wishes!” – **Robyn (Ridley) Estle**

“Gary, Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement! Thank you for all the wonderful memories from when our boys played football for you. So many good memories such as the game at Holton – I think that will forever be our favorite high school football game. We of course cherish the State game in 2007. the State Championship in 2010 – and even though it was a loss – that crazy game in Girard Justin’s senior year.

We can’t thank you enough for the enormous positive impact you had on our 3 sons. Our boys will always admire you and the work ethic you helped to instill in all the boys that you coached. We can only hope that someday their sons will have a football coach like you that they can look up to.

Thank you for all the time you spent away from your family so that you could give your all to our boys and Louisburg football. Your dedication to the football program built it into a State powerhouse and something the whole town could be proud of.

We wish you the best in the years ahead & know you are probably looking forward to a little slower pace come the fall. Thank you again!" – **Rusty and Cathy Jenkins**



"There are way too many memories to have to choose one, from little league baseball to our state championship in football in 2010. One that I'll have with me the rest of my life though, came on the day in November 2010. I remember as Holton scored that last touchdown with the clock running out, it didn't matter. Although we would've liked to kept them to just 10 points, a wins a win. 24-16 to be exact. As that clock ran

out, everyone went crazy and started rushing the field. The first person I hugged was Kody, and then shortly after found my way to Griff. We embraced and for a man who shows little emotion, he was elated. We hugged and I said in his ear, "we did it coach."

That win meant so much for Louisburg, the team, the community, the players before, etc., but among everything else, it meant a lot to Griff. He had been close in the past, but to be able to do it for him in 2010 was truly special. He put his heart and soul into coaching us and he deserves all the credit. There are a lot of memories we shared from elementary school through high school, but I will never forget that one. I respect the heck out of that man. Wishing him all the best in whatever path he chooses next. And I just want to say thank you for all you did for me Griff." – **Nate Daugherty, Class of 2011**

"I have so many funny and great memories over the years with Coach Griff involving sports, plus academics. I'll share one from our Driver's Ed class that he taught; It was how he would zing students by asking aloud if they had checked the 'blinker fluid, and to make sure it's full!' before entering the car. And a couple of them fell for this (haha), but it was all in good fun.

I would like to say further though that Griff was one of the best motivators in coaching I have ever experienced being around. He flat out knew how to get all of us fired up and ready to compete each night. I had so much fun playing football those years! Best wishes moving forward and Go Wildcats!" – **Zach Hildreth, Class of 2010**

"Thanks for all the memories! You have been such a great coach and teacher. I will let you know Libby said, 'Of course he's

leaving, I was supposed to get him next year!’ She was disappointed that you were leaving. Best of luck on your new position and we will still see you across the street!!” – **Traci Storey**

“Gary Griffin – teacher and coach.

I asked Kinsey what she remembered about you and she immediately related the story about biology class when you taught genetics. She said Drew would be lucky as he wouldn’t go bald when he gets older but her kids will because of genetics. She was excited telling the story just the other day as she did when she came home from that freshman class all those years ago.

Thank you for being a coach and mentor to Drew. A very special thanks for the support you gave him when we lost Auston. I know Drew relied on you and the other coaches a great deal.

You have truly made a difference in a great many lives of young people in Louisburg. Thank you for fulfilling your calling and teaching. And you helped make Wildcat Stadium the place to be on Friday nights in the Burg. Wahoo!

Best of luck to you in your new challenge.” – **Jean and Doug Carder**

“He saw the best in all of his athletes. I had him in track for 4 years. My best memory is when we broke the school record for the 4×800 at state. The team was Nathan Goodwin, Mark Sitek, Stephen McTeer and myself. It was the greatest experience ever. He pushed us every meet to challenge with Paola. Our regional meet was a tough meet that year. We finished in the top 4 to go to state.

Out of the 16 teams we were rated 12th going into the race. We



knew as a team we could push for the record and Griff told us what each of us had to run to get the record and push for the medal stand. That was the greatest race any of us ran. It was all because of the belief that Griff had in us as a coach. When he told us our splits, he had the biggest smile on his face. I will never forget that day. It's all because of him and challenging us every day." – **Jamison Parkhill**



"I remember a skinny little kid fresh out of college who came to Louisburg to take the biology job from the monster Meek. It took him a few years to jump into the ranks of coaching, but when he did, it was with both feet. I see in Gary one of the finest most understanding coaches that a high school can have on its staff. My son played for Gary I know the respect and admiration he felt, enough so that he was inspired to coaching as a career. In fact, you could say Gary was his mentor. I

have had a lot of fun with Gary over the years and I am honored to have him as a friend and a fellow coach. Gary is a great, great family man and a great, great coach.” – **Lee and Sherry Littrell**

“Congrats Mr. Griffin! It doesn’t seem like you could be old enough to retire. Then again it doesn’t seem possible that’s it’s been about 27 years since I was in your class! Enjoy your retirement.” – **Becky Jo Howell-Kosters**

“One of my favorite memories was the time Griff cheated and beat me in an arm wrestling match.” – **Mason Koechner, Class of 2017**

“Congratulations Gary!” – **Dara Stambaugh**

“I will forever be grateful to Griff for so many things, but a couple jump out to me.

He was my basketball coach, and the experience of being on the 1999 sub-state championship team is one that I greatly cherish. He was such a wonderful leader for us. He was great with the x’s and o’s, and he was an excellent motivator. But when we were over thinking things or asking too many questions, his patented response of ‘Play basketball’ is one that I still use to this day. I also loved some of his friendly conversations with officials, and his ability to partially mask his frustration (with us or the officials) by yelling into a towel.

He has given me so much helpful advice about teaching, coaching, parenting, and life in general. And since he is a



decorated teacher and coach who has an amazing family, I felt like I was very privileged to receive this inside information. He sometimes is a man of few words, but those words carry a lot of weight. When he talks, people listen, and he is deeply respected by so many. I am truly, unbelievably fortunate to have been coached by him and to teach with him. He is a legend in my book.” – **Jarrold Worthington, LHS Math Teacher**

“I appreciate all the great memories you allowed me to earn at Louisburg High School and beyond. From in the classroom and on the track, you were truly a great mentor. Thanks for pushing me hard and helping me become a sprinter at Iowa State University while earning that Chemical Engineering degree. I would have never guessed that would happen and it definitely wouldn’t have happened without you. Thanks again Coach Griff and Congrats!” – **Mark Sitek, Class of 2011**



“From little league baseball through high school football, there have been so many memorable (State Championship 2010)

and some not-so-memorable (halftime vs Baldwin 2010) moments with you, coach. You taught us the importance of being disciplined, being on time and doing things the right way. You taught me how to work hard, that I can ALWAYS do one more rep. Most importantly, you taught me that quitting is never an option and everything in life is earned. I am forever grateful of your leadership and how you have impacted my life. I'd still run through a brick wall for you coach! Enjoy 'Retirement' Coach Griff!" – **Ross Dvorak, Class of 2011**

"Congratulations Coach! I had mixed emotions when I heard you are retiring but I'm excited to see what you choose to do next. The biggest thing I realized is I need to give you a call and catch up, it has been way to long since we got together.

"I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to learn so much about the game of football from you, both as a player and a fellow coach. I always had so many great memories of playing for you and the other coaches growing up, and now I have even better memories of being a part of your staff. I'm not sure I could thank you enough for bringing me on board as a coach and being so flexible to allow me to stay around for as long as I did. Those were some great years, and I can honestly say you went from one of my old coaches to one of my great friends. I treasure those coaching years even more than my playing days, and those were some of the best years of my life.

It would be difficult to find another person that has given more to the town and student athletes of Louisburg than you have over the past 30 years. Thank you for everything you did to help shape me into the person I am today. As a high school kid I didn't appreciate how much time and energy you and the other coaches put in to make us successful. I know now how hard that must have been not spending as much time with your

own family, so thank you so much for that. You always seemed to a wonderful job of balancing helping the athletes with helping Lori raise your own children, and what a wonderful job you two did.

I have high hopes for your retirement years, mostly I hope you finally learn how to golf well, maybe work on that belly a little bit, and most importantly I hope Lori doesn't kill you for being home too much!!!! The Neff's miss you guys so much and we need to get together to celebrate. We will forever remember those Friday nights at the Griffin House!!!!

Congratulations to the best coach I know, an amazing teacher, a great father and husband, a fantastic role model, and wonderful friend!!!!" – **Billy Neff**

"To think of the impact you have had on the Louisburg community for the past 30 plus years as a teacher and coach is amazing. It is incredible how many people's lives you have impacted in a positive way. Obviously, you have had a major impact on my life. I want to thank you for helping me, as well as every other student or player you have taught or coached, understand the value of hard work, commitment, and perseverance. Thinking of the impact you have had on the community was one of the main motivators for me deciding to transition into teaching and coaching. I know that if at the end of my career, I have had half of the impact you have had, I will have done well for myself. Thanks again for all you have done for me as well as all of Louisburg." – **Drew Harding**

"Gary and I started at Louisburg High School the same year. It was both of our first teaching jobs so I got to know Gary well. Gary has always been one to stay out of the spotlight, never wanting any praise for anything. He was a very gifted teacher and coach. He was always the students' favorite

because he related so well to them and truly cared about them. He was a type of coach the athletes played and worked hard for. That was the expectation he set and they didn't want to disappoint him.

Gary's successes speak for themselves. What people forget that Gary was a very good basketball coach early in his coaching career. I firmly believe Gary was one of the very few guys that had the knowledge and stamina to be a head coach in all the 3 sports and win championships in them all. After going to Osawatomie I tried hiring Gary many times to coach and teach with me. Gary will be truly someone you can't replace. His humble demeanor and willingness to do anything that is asked in the classroom and in the coaching arena separates him from most. I wish Gary the very best!" – **Doug Chisam, Osawatomie High School Principal**



“Coach Griff was a great influence to all of the students and athletes who had the privilege of learning from him. He helped me, along with countless others, develop the work ethic that has allowed us to succeed in many other aspects of life outside of the classroom and off the field. Wish you nothing but the best in retirement. Thanks for everything coach!” – **Dain Glenn, Class of 2013**

“Congratulations! Thank you for being a strong motivator and encouragement in not only the sports you coached, but for the others I played as well. It takes a special person to do what you’ve done. Louisburg is lucky to have the Griffin family!” – **Madison (Wertz) Sanders, Class of 2011**

“Best wishes coach, thanks for all the memories!” – **Wes Hutson**

“Coach Griffin, It was an honor and a privilege to be able to grow up around you and your family. I can’t express how grateful I am to have had you as a coach and mentor. Thank you for all that you have given to this city!” – **Nate Goodwin**

“Gary, I have so many memories of you because of your daughter, Gentry, being my best friend from age 7 up to now. Some of my fondest include – you being patient with us strolling down the street playing our clarinets, going to football games and watching you lead the team to victory (Gent was always so proud to claim that you were her dad), going on an 18 hour car ride to Arizona with the fam, you giving me tips with track and basketball, seeing you teach Gent and Drew and mostly you being a great male influence!” – **Taylor Brown**





“Coach Griff,

I can't even begin to thank you enough for putting up with us in AP Bio as we made sure the fish was fed (because you claimed you were trying to kill it by starving it to death).

I appreciate you not judging my morbid moment of tearing through the dissection frog skull 10 seconds before class was over (had to get its brain for the few extra credit points!).

Thank you for at least pretending to have faith in my athletic abilities by always allowing me to run hurdles even though odds were against me to stay on my feet the whole race.

Most of all, thank you for so many great memories, successes in the classroom and on the field, all the laughs, and of course the life lessons (I'll just assume there were a few good lessons in there somewhere). You will be missed for sure, but life has so much more ahead for you! Good luck and congratulations on retirement!" – **Chelsea (Morland) Bell, Class of 2009**

"Griff, Congratulations on your new journey and thanks for not flunking me after I licked the dissection frog in AP Bio for \$10." – **Jesse Morland, Class of 2011**

"Griff,

Thank you so much for being an awesome teacher!! Your class was one of the few classes I actually looked forward to going to everyday, minus the dissections, I wasn't a fan of those.

I also wasn't a fan of you during track. You may find it hard to believe, but you're kind of a really mean looking person when you yell.

All in all, you were a pretty alright teacher and coach and I just want to thank you for not letting your predetermined opinions about Chelsea and Jesse alter your love for me. Let's be honest, they were terrible students and we all know I was the favorite Morland.

Thank you again for everything you've done for me and for all of Louisburg, you will be greatly missed! Congratulations on retirement, you don't look a day over 30!" – **Kalli Morland, Class of 2014**

"Griff, Congratulations on your retirement! I am very fortunate to not only have had you as a coach and as a teacher, but as a role model and someone to look up to. Your devotion, passion and integrity has influenced me more than you'll ever know. Thank you for investing in me, encouraging me, and for showing me what it looks like to work hard, be resilient, and never give up. The values you instilled in me will set me apart in all my endeavors. Forever grateful." – **Will Garza, Class of 2014**

"Griff,

Congratulations on your many years of service and dedication to the community! I wish you nothing but the best in your next endeavor. You have been a fantastic teacher and amazing coach to so many people over the years, myself included. Some of my fondest memories from my time at Louisburg have you in them. From Biology class to the brutal conditioning days at the beginning of track season to the numerous track meets, you were an integral piece as well as someone I continue to tell friends and family about when I am sharing stories. Thank you for all that you did for me and the many other lives you have had an impact on over your tenure. You were by far and hands down one of my favorite teachers and coaches I have ever had! All The Best!" – **Liz Mortensen, Class of 2007**





“One of the things I’ve remember about having Griff as a coach is he would always be honest with you, whether you liked what he had to say or not. It taught us that if what we were doing wasn’t good enough, then to keep working harder until it was good enough. Lots of respect for you coach and I wish you the best of luck!” – **Wyatt Sander, Class of 2014**

“I played football and track for Coach Griff. He was always a great balance of tough love and consideration. He pushed me to become better in not just my athletics but also in my everyday life. I’ll never forget driving back from the State Track Meet my senior year with a few other seniors and Griff and just talking about our coming futures as we were all headed off to do different things. Then Griff missed our exit and we got to talk for an extra 30 minutes. Griff made an incredibly positive impact on my life, so I wish him the best in all of his future endeavors.” – **Mason Wilde, Class of 2015**

"I played football under coach Griffin for four years at Louisburg High School. My senior year of football we were playing Eudora in the playoffs to go to substate and all game their quarterback had been tearing apart our defense. On this specific third down, their quarterback's last name was Ballock, and he got the ball and proceeded to make it past our front line of the defense and into the secondary where I was playing safety. He gave me a move and completely jukeed me out of my shoes. Once we were able to stop them on that drive, I went to the sidelines and Griff comes up to me and says, "Do I need to put somebody else out there?!" I've never been more frightened in my life by coach Griff, because I knew he was serious.

We ended up losing the game and ending my senior season, however, once we got to the locker room and we had our post-game discussion. Griff comes up to me grinning and chuckling and says, "I like a little fight." He and I had always had a serious coach-player relationship and it helped ease the feeling of my senior season ending to see him in high spirits and laughing about something that had happened during a, not so pretty, game. Best wishes to coach Griffin in his retirement and further chapter in life. I wouldn't be the man I am today if it weren't for his leadership and guidance as I became a young man." – **Chris Chase, Class of 2013**



“One story that I always laugh about is after the state championship game in 2010, and I asked him why he looked so red faced and grouchy on the sidelines during the first part of the game. He said he was fighting some indigestion from the pregame meal at Sirloin Stockade! And I thought all along that he was nervous about the game!

Good luck Griff and thanks for your years of service as a coach and a teacher.” – Mark **“Bubble” Hildreth**

“Entering my sophomore year of football I definitely was not the biggest player on the team and in fact I was known for being short and fast, so coach Griffin originally gave me the nickname ‘rabbit’ just because the best thing I could do was run. Then one practice when teammates said I need to be angry, I decided to try it with the freshman team (class of 2016). It

was a simple option play when I was on defense, the result was me shaking off the wide receiver and plowing through the runner, which through adrenaline I ended up starting to growl and Griffin told me to 'growl again' roughly 3 times then yelling 'that's the god damn honeybadger' and the whole team erupted and from that day on Coach Griffin gave me that extra confidence of having a threatening nickname making those last 3 years very memorable having that title beside my name. Thank you Coach Griffin for giving momentum to add to my name!" – **Zach Knox, The Louisburg Honey Badger**

"Congratulations Teacher/Coach Griff on your retirement. Thank you for the hours you poured into our lives teaching and coaching. Enjoy your family!! God Bless!" – **Cris and Samantha Pritchard**

"Hey Griff – the Hupp's would like to wish you the best as you enter a new chapter. All of our boys will cherish the special bonds you developed with them! You had a way of bringing out the best in them. You are a very special teacher/coach and will be missed!! We will all remember how charismatic and chatty you were too!! – **The Hupp Family**

"Congrats on your own journey, coach. Louisburg Football has a special place in all our hearts. As I age, I'm consistently reminded how great my LHS coaches were. A lot about life can be learned on the football field. Personally, it prepared myself. Everyday is a great day to get better! Sending best wishes from Florida." – **Chad Renner #22**





“Coach Griffin,

Best of luck with everything in the future. You are a great man and leader, not just for me, but for all the students you had the opportunity to have. You will be deeply missed! I will miss your advice and conversations more than you know. Thank you again for everything and I wish you and your family nothing but the best!” – **Kyle Conley, LHS Teacher and Soccer Coach**

“The great thing about Coach Griffin was his support of students at LHS and his support for a total high school experience by the students.

In 2005 the Louisburg FFA National Food Science team had the starting center/defensive lineman, starting wide receiver/defensive back and the team’s long snapper. Coach

Griffin supported their decision to miss a **district game** and attend the National FFA Convention. He told the boys they worked hard and earned the right to go and he would not hold that against them.

In 2006 two Louisburg FFA members who started both ways chose to attend the National FFA Convention and participate in the Food Science Contest. They missed the **district game against Paola**. Again Coach Griffin applied no pressure. This also happened in 2003, 2009, and 2011.

Treating players with support and respect rather than dominating them by fear might be why he has taken teams deep into state playoffs and winning the 2010 State Championship.

While sports certainly can enhance the high school experience so do many other activities. My desire is that all coaches and parents look at sports the way Coach Griffin does...a part of a total program. Congratulations Coach Griffin in your retirement from LHS." – **Jim Morgan, LHS FFA Adviser**

"My favorite memory of Coach Griffin is when we were coming home from winning a state championship in track. I actually saw Griff dancing to the music at the gas station when we were fueling up. He was a great mentor and awesome coach who enjoys his time with the kids. Good Luck Griff." – **Greg Darrington, girls track and field coach**

"One story I can share about my coaching experience with Gary was a few years ago when he returned to coach basketball at the middle school level. Gary had previously been the head boys basketball coach at LHS years earlier. I was excited to have his years of experience to help out with the group of seventh graders that year. His coaching assignment was with the JV. I had varsity. Prior to the season, I had warned Gary

about the discrepancy between coaching high school varsity and middle school JV. He vowed to me that he was going to take a patient, more laid-back approach with this level.

Everything was going well until about halfway through the season, when I could tell his expectations were not being met, and he was growing more frustrated. It all came to a head one night when his players were playing uninspired basketball and his patience was wearing thin. He emerged from the locker room at halftime by himself and sat down on the bench with his arms crossed and legs extended. I asked him if he was ok. Like a man that had just 'fallen off the wagon' he shook his head back and forth and replied in a rather disappointed, but relieved tone... 'Well, I did it!' He had chewed on his players for their poor performance. It appeared to be good therapy for him and his players for the remainder of the season. They turned it around and finished out the season strong...

Best of Luck Gary in your future endeavors!" – **John Ozier, LMS basketball coach**



“Congratulations Griff! Thanks for your words of wisdom over the years!” – **Jessica Compliment, LHS Volleyball Coach**

“I just wanted to thank Griff for everything he has done for me and taught me in the past six years. As well as when I was a substitute teacher in this district 10 years ago for the advice he was willing to give to a young educator whom he owed absolutely nothing too. Best of luck!” – **Robert Ebenstein, LHS head football coach**

“Best wishes to Gary. It has been a pleasure to work with you these many years. I appreciate you allowing me to be a part of



the program. I have always admired the way that you handle the student athletes. There have been many occasions that I recall, but there are two that really stick out to me.

First, is the way you bravely protected Coach Lohse and Coach Ebenstein when we found the UPS driver stranded in KCK. Secondly, I have seen you handle many situations that were above and beyond what a coach is required. There have been times when the student needed football more than football needed them. Also, spending time with a young man and his family during crisis, even while preparing for the playoffs. You are a good man, Gary.” – **Damon Dennis, LHS Athletic Trainer**

“My junior year of track I believe I was sick to school one day that happened to be when everyone had to try out for the relays. I was a lazy jumper and knew I wouldn’t be running anyway. So at the first meet he threw me in the 400 as punishment. I still have to get him back. He is a great person and a great coach. Thank you!” – **Jacob Herbert**

“Hi Griff, I never had you as a teacher, despite growing up here in Louisburg, but I want to thank you for being there for Quinn, not just as a coach but as a really inspiring teacher. He has been so disinterested in school from the get-go, but your class really turned him on to science and biology. He learned and retained so much and it is driving him into health sciences after high school.

Of course, thank you for the incredible amount of your life that you have given to Quinn, through track, and to all of the kids that have moved through Louisburg athletics. The way you relate to the students is very special and your presence here will be greatly missed.” – **Lesley Rigney**

“On behalf of the entire Dvorak family, we thank you for teaching Ryan, Ross and Bailey not only the subject of Biology, but also providing an example of great work ethic. Winning state football in 2010 will always be a special memory. Watching the development of our boys into young men and inspiring them to work towards a goal was instrumental. We so appreciate your listening ear, encouraging all three of our kids to further their love of sports to play at the next level. USD 416 will not be the same without Coach Griff. Peace to you as you journey on.” – **The Dvorak Family**



“To a great teacher and awesome coach! Congratulations and I wish you the best in the future!” – **Linda Haight**

“Coach Griff has been my track coach for the past 4 years. He has taught me to push myself so that I can become a better

runner and he has challenged me to strive as an athlete. Something he has always said to me is 'running is one thing that, you get out of it, what you put into it.' Track has really shown through to that. I want to thank him for allowing me to find myself in a sport because he was there to push me to do my best and run hard. The past 4 years of track have been successful because of him and I can't thank him enough for providing that opportunity for me." – **Kaitlyn Gaza, Class of 2017**

"Griff has always been a positive role model. From a young age, I watched him coach my brother and other Wildcat football players knowing that's who I wanted to be. Over the course of 4 years in the football and track programs, Griff has transformed me not only as an athlete, but as a person. He knows how to work hard and get the best out of each athlete that wants to compete for him. If you're willing to put in the work, he will lead you to success.

There is nothing negative to be said about Gary Griffin and those who disagree are blind to the amount of passion and care he puts into his work. I will never forget my time as a Louisburg Wildcat, and much of that I have Griff to thank for. I wish you the best of luck wherever you may end up, but I know you will always be able to call Louisburg home. You have certainly left your mark on this small town and those who have been through it." – **T.J. Dover, Class of 2017**

"My favorite memory of Griff is more of a summation of memories. Anyone who knows him well or has been coached by him has seen how nervous he gets before football games on Friday night. You can see it on his expressions and hear it when speaks. But it was never nervousness based out of fear, it was an eagerness to start every game. As soon as the game starts,

his demeanor immediately shifts to one of intense focus, but also collected. At that time he is completely immersed in the present. No matter the circumstance, opponent or score, he always seemed to have the same joy and excitement to be around the game of football.

From a work ethic standpoint, there are very few people that have taught me as much as Griff. I know when I decide I want something, there is no one that will outwork me for it. Working hard for my goals comes as second nature now, and that is a result of being a player and student under Gary Griffin.”

– **Ashton Dover, Class of 2010**

“Griff, You have made an impact on so many lives not only in the classroom but on the field. I’m so glad I got the opportunity to be a football trainer. I had the time of my life and I will always remember it. Thank you for always being someone that everyone could count on, no matter the situation. Louisburg won’t be the same without you. Thank you for everything.” – **Ali Dover**

“I just wanted to give Coach Griff a special thank you for taking the time to coach my son, Chris Williams. Coach Griff has been a wonderful mentor and I appreciate him taking the time to teach my son certain tools and techniques within track. I know Chris will miss him. Best Wishes and enjoy!” – **Jennifer Post**

“Lots of great memories of games and stats keeping for you and staff. Best wishes for whatever the future holds. Lots of fun times.” – **Don Stowell**

“Setting...LHS...your first year teaching Biology. Not only were you the new kid on the block filling Don Meek’s Biology class ‘shoes’, but you were ‘fighting off’ your adoring female students!! I remember at the end of the day your slumping in the chair next to my desk thinking you’d never survive!! But you did survive, and thrive!!

You’ve positively impacted hundreds of kids’ lives in ways you may never know. You encouraged me when I decided to finally get my BSN. I’d have never passed Bio & Chem without you and Bill, let alone finish my degree!!

Being on the football sidelines watching and listening to you coach, teach, discipline, and build the tradition – Louisburg Football – was a privilege that we cherish. So many exciting times! Winning state 2010 was such a beautifully indelible memory. Thanks for the memories, Gary!! Go make more!! Love you and Lori and your great kids!!” – **Carolyn Stowell**

“Griff – Some of my best memories from high school were in your class. Thanks for always making it fun. Your sarcasm cannot be matched! Hope you have a fun and relaxing retirement. You deserve it.” – **Katie Haas, Class of 2004**

“Thanks Gary for being an awesome role model and football coach to Zach and a great friend to us. We are so happy for you and wish you all the best.” – **Jenny DuBois**



“Best Wishes Mr. Griffin, one awesome teacher and a heck of a coach. Thank you for all your years as a Wildcat.” – **Stacy Horn**

“Congratulations!! You have been a great coach for the



Louisburg Wildcats!" – Rowena Jahansouz

"Thanks for all the great Wildcat football years!! Enjoyed watching the Cats play. You will be missed!!!" – **Juanita Browning Stone**

"Mr. Griffin coached my 5th grade basketball team, taught me high school biology, AP biology, and was my high school track coach. Also, Gentry and Garrett were in the grade above and below me and are both my friends. All that to say, Griff probably got to spend more time with me than he was really interested to.

One time, when I was a high school senior in Griff's AP biology class, I decided I would try a joke out on him that I heard on the Office. I think we were dissecting something, and I said to Griff, 'Hey, does it smell like Up Dog to you in here?' and Griff looked at me like I was an idiot (I was) and said 'What the hell is up dog?' I laughed so much harder than the joke warranted and said, 'Not much Griff! What's up with you??' He rolled his eyes and walked away. I share that story because I think, it might capture Griff. Unruffled and mostly unamused by the general stupidity of 17 year olds.

Griff is not effusive. As my high school track coach, he signed me up for the 400m. That race was basically hell. It was a race where you had to trick your body into thinking it could sprint for a quarter of a mile. After Griff spent weeks making fun of me because I couldn't figure out how to use starting blocks, I ran the race in a meet. I ran it as hard as I possibly could and I'm pretty sure I was so winded I couldn't talk afterwards. Griff was waiting at the finish line and said, with the most inflection I'd ever heard in his voice, 'Now that is how you run a 400m!' I think that was 8 years ago and I still remember. I still remember because with

Griff, praise did not come easy or cheap. Griff had our respect, and he'd earned it. He made us do our best, run harder than we wanted to, and when we'd worked so hard we finally stopped talking, he said 'Good job.' I think it takes a pretty special person to coax that kind of effort out of high schoolers. Griff made it look easy for a long time. Louisburg will miss him!" – **Carlisle Houchen**

"Oh my brother Gary! Even when I think about him I tear up for some reason. I think it's simply because he is 'that guy.' That guy that I always turn to when I need to talk about my own life and the life of my children. That guy who I have always looked up to and wanted to make proud of me. That guy I always tell all the people I work with and all the people in Scott City about because I am that proud of him.

That guy who is as selfless as it comes and is one heck of a class act! "That guy who has set the standard high for other teachers and coaches when it comes to integrity. That guy who expects the most of his students and athletes and gives it in return. He is the best brother any person could ever ask for and I wish him the very best of everything!!" – **Susan Kite, Gary's sister**



“Dad, it is incredible the impact that you have had on the Louisburg community in the 30 plus years you have been here! You have touched so many lives as both a teacher and a coach, teaching not only biology and plays, but also life skills like hard work, leadership, teamwork, discipline, determination, respect, and responsibility. Not many people can say they had their dad as a driver’s ed instructor, teacher, and coach, but I loved having that experience!

It wasn’t always easy to share you with the whole town of Louisburg. There were times when you had to sacrifice time with your own family to spend time with your players watching film, practicing, or being at games. I am so proud of all you have accomplished in your career as a teacher and a coach, but more importantly, I am proud to call you my dad! Love, Gent” – **Gentry (Griffin) Harding**

“Gary, it’s hard to believe it’s been 32 years. Time really does fly. The community of Louisburg has been so kind and supportive to our family and a great place to raise our kids.

You have taught and coached hundreds of amazing kids and your message has always been for them to be responsible, get a good

education, be kind and always do the right thing...You have definitely left an impression on many.

We have had a couple low and hard years but mostly highs...2010!!! You finally got the monkey off your back.

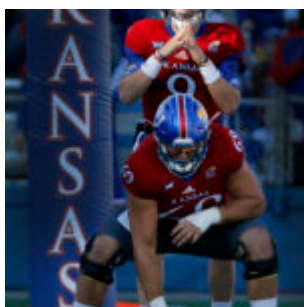
Hopefully the best is yet to come!!! Congratulations!! Love you!

PS...still waiting on the swimming pool!!” – **Lori Griffin**

“Hey Griff, we have one question for you before you go...do you know who won the Spring Hill/De Soto game? Just let us know. Thanks Griff! Appreciate it!” – **LHS Football Staff**

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## **Ribordy named to 2017 Rimington Spring Watch List**



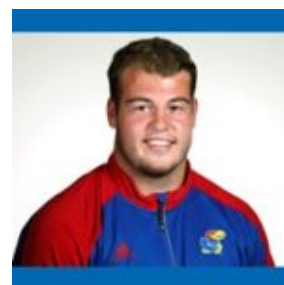
University of Kansas center Mesa Ribordy (69) was named to the 2017 Rimington Trophy Spring Watch List on Monday. Ribordy, a Louisburg High School graduate, was a fixture on the Jayhawk offensive line last season.

LAWRENCE – Two years ago, he walked on to the University of Kansas football team hoping to land a spot at tight end.

Two years later, Mesa Ribordy is being considered as one of the top centers in Division I football.

Ribordy, a 2015 Louisburg High School graduate, was named to the 2017 Rimington Trophy Spring Watch List on Monday, according to a release put out by the school.

According to the release, the committee accepted nominations from programs across the country that submitted their current starting centers for consideration. This preseason, at least one player from each conference was nominated, with the MAC leading at nine student-athletes selected and the Big 12 and SEC following with eight each, respectively.



**Mesa Ribordy**

The Rimington Trophy is presented annually to the Most Outstanding Center in NCAA Division I-A College Football. Since its inception, the Rimington Trophy has raised over \$2.9 million for the cystic fibrosis community. The award is overseen by the Boomer Esiason Foundation, which is committed to finding a cure for cystic fibrosis and has raised over \$130 million for the fight against cystic fibrosis.

The center with the most first team votes will be determined the winner. If there is a tie with first team votes, then the center with the most second team votes will win. If there is still a tie, the winner will be determined by a majority vote from the Rimington Trophy committee. The winner will be

recognized at the Rimington Trophy Presentation at the Rococo Theatre in Lincoln, Neb., on Jan. 13, 2018.

Ribordy played a big part in the Jayhawk offensive line as a freshman. He started the season at guard, before moving to center for the final five games.

Ribordy didn't record a bad snap in those five games and posted 27 knock-down blocks in his 11 games. At center, he was in charge of coordinating protection schemes and missed a team-low 10 assignments in his 800 plays last season.

The 6-foot-4, 305-pound lineman will lead the Jayhawk offensive line this coming season. The Jayhawks open the season on Sept. 2 when they host Southeast Missouri State.

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## 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

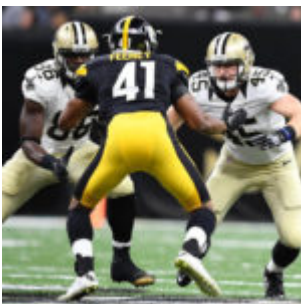
play each other in football.

“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.”

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## **Griffin ready to take step forward with Saints**



New Orleans Saints tight end, and Louisburg High School alum, Garrett Griffin (45) is ready to take what he learned off the practice squad last season and make the Saints roster this



**year.**

As college football players around the country wait to hopefully hear their name called during this weekend's NFL Draft, Garrett Griffin remembers what that whole experience was like.

A year ago, Griffin wasn't sure if football was even going to be in his future. He was about to graduate from the Air Force Academy and he garnered interest from a few NFL teams.

They liked what they saw out of the 6-foot-4 inch tight end in his pro day, but Griffin was prepared to leave football behind and turn all his focus to the military life.

"After my pro day, I knew I might get an opportunity but I wasn't sure when it was going to come," Griffin said. "You usually have to serve two years in the Air Force first, so I knew some teams weren't sure how that was going affect me."

That doubt left Griffin undrafted, but once the Air Force delayed his service commitment, he was allowed to pursue his dream of playing professional football. That dream became a reality when Griffin signed a free agent contract with the New Orleans Saints last year.

Although he didn't earn a spot with the Saints out of training camp, New Orleans signed him to the practice squad where he spent all of the 2016 season – learning and soaking up what it takes to play in the NFL.

The Louisburg High School alum worked out at tight end, played a little fullback and also did some long snapping and special teams work. Griffin wanted to make sure he did everything he could to give him the best chance at staying with the Saints.

"During (training) camp last year, the coaches told me they kind of view me as a project and hopefully I can help the team

in the future,” Griffin said. “I knew I wasn’t ready to play (this past) year because I wasn’t ready to do some of the things they were going to ask me to do. They told me I could be playing a lot of positions, whether it is a receiving tight end or fullback. It is also valuable that I can long snap. Just being able to do a lot things can only help me.”

Griffin’s first year in the NFL was a blur as he didn’t have much time to let it all sink in. He graduated from the Air Force Academy, then quickly moved on to work out with the Saints.

He had to get bigger, faster and stronger in just a few weeks time as training camp was just around the corner. Griffin had a good training camp, but he suffered a hamstring injury that cost him a couple weeks of workouts during the preseason.

“I put on a lot of weight, but I wasn’t necessarily where I should have been,” Griffin said. “I was in good shape, and I was strong, but I put on weight so fast because that is what I needed to do and I don’t think my body was ready to handle it. I think that is why I messed my hamstring up during camp.”

Those lack of snaps left Griffin on the wrong side of the training camp cuts, but he never left the Saints as he was signed to the practice squad just days later. It was there where he stayed for the entire 2016 season.

On the scout team, Griffin faced off against members of the Saints starting defense on a daily basis.

“I got to go against Cam Jordan (defensive end) every day and I think that made me better,” Griffin said. “He is a Pro Bowler and to go up against him helped me out a lot just to get ready for what I can expect.”

Griffin also had some veterans take him under his wing as his locker is right next to veteran fullback John Kuhn, who was a longtime Green Bay Packer before signing with the Saints last

season.

"I am not sure any one thing stood out, but it was just really cool to become friends with some really good dudes that I didn't think I would ever meet," Griffin said. "(Kuhn) is a legend in Green Bay. He is starting to become a legend in New Orleans just because he is a really good dude. He started his career in kind of the same situation as me. He went to a smaller school, but he was on the practice squad for the (Pittsburgh) Steelers and he has just helped me out throughout the year. He is just a really good guy to talk to and we come from similar upbringings.

"Our locker room is great and I get along with everyone. I think everyone gets along and I don't think it is like that everywhere. Any time you need something, the veterans are there for you and that is coolest part about last year is just to see how close everyone was."

That closeness to the other players was important as the season started to become a grind. As a member of the practice squad, he was in the same meetings as the Saints starters and practiced with the team six days a week.

When the players went to the team hotel following workouts on Saturdays, Griffin stayed behind to watch the games on television, only to do it all over again the next week.

"It is good being on the scout team because you are preparing like you are going to play, but you aren't really and it is a good learning experience," he said. "We traveled to two games. The home games, we have walkthrough and practice till like 2 on Saturday and the rest of the time we just try and relax.

"We went to an LSU game once and we try to go out and see New Orleans. I just wanted to take advantage of the fact that we have some free time and all the older guys told us to enjoy it because once you start playing every week, it is football non-stop."

Although he wasn't on the active roster, Griffin would still get recognized around New Orleans from fans and get asked for the occasional autograph.

"I don't see myself any different than when I was in high school," Griffin said. "Sometimes it is a little awkward because they think I am famous and I know that I am not. It is really cool though because everyone appreciates the fact that the fan base is great, and it is such a cool, historic city and it is great to be a part of that.

"After (Hurricane) Katrina, the Saints were what helped bring the city together. The fans know everyone. They know the practice squad guys and a lot of the people that work behind the scenes. They even know who our chef is in our cafeteria. They just worship Saints football."

Probably the most popular Saint is Drew Brees. The all-pro and Super Bowl MVP quarterback is looked up to by many in the Saints locker room and Griffin is one of them.

"I have had some interactions with him and he is a great guy," Griffin said. "There was a time where he broke a record and they were talking about it on ESPN. I was talking to him at lunch and he was embarrassed that it was even on TV. He is a really humble guy and he could care less about his stats. It is cliché to say that, but he is a great dude and he earns everything he gets.

"Quarterbacks have to prepare so much more than everyone. They are pretty much coaches. It is cool to see how hard he works and you realize why he is so good. When you walk in the door, he has already been there for two hours watching film. He has his routine and it is the exact same thing every day. He is a perfectionist. He is obviously talented, but watching how hard he works, he sets a great example for everyone else."

By the time the Brees era is over in New Orleans, Griffin hopes to become a target for the future hall of fame

quarterback. He is behind veteran tight end Coby Fleener and a couple others on the roster, but Griffin is ready to do what it takes to move from the practice squad and on to the big stage.

Griffin is currently in New Orleans working out with the team as he prepares for minicamp, and then eventually another training camp later this summer.

“I think the ultimate goal for me is not only to make a team, but to contribute,” Griffin said. “The thing about the NFL is that when you are on a roster, you are going to play quite a bit because there aren’t many spots. Once you make a roster though, it is all business. It is a ruthless business and they can cut you any time they want. I just want to stay on the team, contribute and help win some games and maybe make the playoffs.”

Following the conclusion of the 2016 season, Griffin returned home to Louisburg to spend time with his parents Gary and Lori Griffin, his sister Gentry and other family and friends – people he didn’t get to see much the last four years due to his service in the Air Force Academy and then spending the last seven months with the Saints.

“This is actually the first time that I have had off since I started playing sports in high school,” Griffin said. “I just wanted to let everything heal, let my legs get back under me and just get my body right.

“I was able to see some friends from high school and I got a chance to just hang out at home, which was fine with me. My dad likes that I am home because he says my mom cooks a lot more when I am around. It was great to actually spend some time with both my parents and hopefully I didn’t annoy them too much.”

It was a much-needed getaway for Griffin as he had an opportunity to refocus and prepare himself for what he plans

to be an eventful 2017 season with the Saints. He wants a chance at making the active roster and help New Orleans take the next step following a 7-9 season a year ago.

Still, Griffin knows his roster spot can be taken at any time and he could be left without a football home.

“It is a great way to make a living and it is a lot of people’s dream to play in the NFL, but I don’t think people realize just how stressful that it is,” Griffin said. “You walk in on Tuesday, which is our off day, but everyone still comes in to work out. That is when they work out free agents and every week it seems like they are working out 20 people. Anyone can take your job at any time. Especially in camp, you are on edge 24-7.

“Coach (Sean) Payton always says that we are all on a train right now, but everyone gets off at some point. For some people it is sooner than others, so just try and enjoy it while you are on it. It is not long for most people.”

For Griffin, he hopes that train doesn’t pull into the station any time soon.

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## **Koechner selected to play in Shrine Bowl**





**Louisburg High School senior Mason Koechner found out earlier this month that was selected to play in the 2017 Kansas Shrine Bowl later this year. Koechner earned all-league and all-state honors on the defensive linen this past season.**

Once football season was complete, Mason Koechner watched as he began to get recognized by league coaches and media.

It started with first team all-league honors and first team all-state selections came shortly after. It was a barrage of awards that came following what was a successful season for the Louisburg High School senior.

Five months following his final snap on the high school football field, one more award came Koechner's way.

On April 3, Koechner was informed that was he was selected to participate in the 2017 Kansas Shrine Bowl. Only 68 seniors from across the state are selected to participate in the charity all-star football game and Koechner was added to the list by different sports media in Kansas, along with the Kansas Shrine Bowl coaching staff.

"It is a great honor and I am proud to be able to represent Louisburg," Koechner said. "I was pretty excited when I heard and I am definitely looking forward to it."

The all-start contest will be held on July 29 at Butler County Community College in El Dorado and Koechner will play for the East squad under Rossville head coach Derick Hammes. The Shrine Bowl game, and events surrounding the contest, will benefit Shriners Hospitals for Children, which is a health care system of 22 hospitals dedicated to improving the lives of children.

The Kansas Shrine Bowl is a non-profit charity raising funds and awareness for the Shriners Hospitals for Children. The

Shrine Bowl has been in existence since 1974, and since its inception, it has been promoting Kansas talent and the network of hospitals raising over \$2.5 million.

A week before the game, Koechner will practice with his East teammates and also spend time with Shriners Hospital patients. It was an experience that a former teammate, Anders Vance, took part in last season.

Vance represented Louisburg a year ago and Koechner heard several good things from him about his time at the event.

“Anders is a good friend of mine,” Koechner said. “He’s had nothing to say but good things. He made lots of friends that he regularly keeps in touch with so I am definitely looking forward to it and it seems like a great experience to be a part of.”

Koechner had a big season for the Wildcats on both sides of the ball this past season. As defensive lineman, he finished with 67 tackles, including two sacks and two tackles for a loss.

On the offensive line, he helped block for an offense that totaled nearly 4,000 yards on the season.

“I am very excited for Mason and for the opportunity for him to play in the Shrine Bowl,” Louisburg football coach Robert Ebenstein said. “I know Mason will represent himself, his family, his school and this community very well in the game as well as the Shriners activities that they have planned for the week.

“I know the East coaching staff very well having coached with coach Hammes during my time at Rural. Coach Hammes is going to love Mason and the aggressiveness he plays with as well as his contagious positive attitude.”

Following his wrestling season in early March, Koechner had to

have knee surgery, but he will be ready to go in time for the game in July and also for workouts with his new team – Garden City Community College – in June.

“I am doing as much as I can to recover as quickly as possible,” Koechner said. “They told me I should be fully recovered on June 1 and then I will report to Garden City for three weeks of summer workouts.”

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## Frontier League shakeup could happen soon



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

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

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

Brian Biermann, superintendent of USD 416, and Louisburg High School athletic director Darin Gagnebin attended the meeting

on Louisburg's behalf and both relayed the fact that every school stated they were happy with the way the league is currently set up, but a couple schools came to the realization the Frontier League might not be able to offer what they are looking for.

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

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

"De Soto said they will probably open next year with 950 kids and they would grow by 100 the year after that," Biermann said. "They are happy in the Frontier, but they feel like they need 5A competition and they feel like it could hurt them in football with seedings and tie-breakers. They could potentially get penalized by competing in a mainly 4A league.

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

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

According to a report in March from the *Tonganoxie Mirror*, Lansing wants to create a larger league that would contain all or some combinations of Lansing, Blue Valley Southwest, De

Soto, Leavenworth, Bonner Springs, Basehor-Linwood, Tonganoxie, Ottawa, Piper, Spring Hill, Turner and Topeka schools Seaman, Shawnee Heights and Topeka West.

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

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

“We visited with our board of education and we are not in favor of a mega-league,” Biermann said. “That has been talked about – having a league of 5A and 4A schools. We don’t want to invite new 5A schools. We are ok with Spring Hill and De Soto staying in the league, even though they are growing, but we don’t want to invite other 5A schools or have a mega league so they can have better competition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We want to maintain the integrity of our league, whether that is with seven or even eight schools,” Gagnebin said. “We want to maintain that number. Nine is a scheduling nightmare, and



if you only have six teams, you are opening up a can of worms where if you leave an open spot, then the state could come in and assign certain schools to us that aren't a good fit.

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

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

"If the dominoes start falling fast, the league could pass a bylaw amendment to allow for movement for De Soto or whoever, which is something I think they will have to do," Gagnebin said. "Not much is happening now, but when it does it is going to happen quick. You better be ready to move with it and have a plan in place or you could be stuck on the outside."

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## **Ebenstein hired as new Wildcat head football coach**



Robert Ebenstein was hired as the new Louisburg High School football coach following the USD 416 Board of Education

**meeting. Ebenstein spent five years in Louisburg as an assistant and takes over for interim coaches Gary Griffin and Jeff Lohse.**

Louisburg High School will have a new leader on the sidelines when the Wildcats take the field in September, but he is a familiar face to many with the program.

Robert Ebenstein was hired as Louisburg's new head football coach and it was officially approved Monday during the monthly USD 416 Board of Education meeting. Ebenstein will take over for interim coaches Gary Griffin and Jeff Lohse.

"I am pretty pumped," Ebenstein said. "When it became available, I was definitely interested in it and it is really a privilege to be the head football coach. Everyone has been congratulating me on the job, but it really isn't a job to me because I love football so much as does every head coach. It is great to be able to do this in Louisburg because I can continue to make relationships, raise my kids here and have my family around."

Ebenstein has spent the last five years as an assistant for the Wildcats under head coaches Kyle Littrell and Griffin. He served as a line coach for Louisburg and before that he spent four years as an assistant at Washburn Rural High School. He also spent time as an assistant at Gardner-Edgerton.

It is that experience and familiarity that made it an easy choice for the Wildcats. The search for a head coach had been ongoing after the resignation of Littrell last August and Griffin and Lohse were named interim co-head coaches last season.

"I am excited about it," LHS activities director Darin

Gagnebin said. "I think he will bring a new energy to the program. I know he is ready to move up to be a head coach. He is going to be faced with challenges with some coaching spots open, but he is ready to tackle that head on."

Football has always been a big part of his life. Ebenstein, a Spring Hill High School graduate, got into coaching a little sooner than he had hoped.

Ebenstein had offers to play college football, but late in his senior year he was in a car accident that resulted in a broken hip and a shattered pelvis.

"I felt like football was taken from me a little bit," Ebenstein said. "In my mind, I wasn't done with it yet."

Following high school, he had the opportunity to become an assistant coach at Highland Community College for two years before finishing his degree at Pittsburg State.

"Football is something I have loved forever," he said. "It is honestly a privilege. The kids in this community are so welcoming, especially to a Spring Hill graduate. From day one they have been nothing but respectful and any time we need something the parents are always there to help out. I am thankful for the opportunity and we will make the best of it."

Ebenstein even remembers a few battles with Louisburg while at Spring Hill – one in particular.

"I remember playing Louisburg and Griff (Gary Griffin) was the head coach when I was there," Ebenstein said. "I remember getting screamed at by a Louisburg coach on the sideline because I got a little too close to the sideline for a hit. I just remember it was the coach who was wearing shorts when it was 20 degrees outside with huge calves and it was (former assistant) coach (Wayne) Whiting."

Ebenstein realizes the Louisburg job is a healthy one because

of those coaches that came before him that have established a strong tradition within the program.

“The staff here at Louisburg is better than anyone I have ever been with,” he said. “Working with Griff, (Larry) Aylor, Whiting, Lohse and (Billy) Neff, and then working with Littrell when he took over, they are all just a wealth of knowledge. They were very supportive of me through this process and I am very grateful to them for everything. If some of the coaches don’t end up being here next year, then I know they are just a phone call away if I need help with anything.”

Ebenstein plans to work on the offensive side of the ball, while Lohse will stay on staff as the defensive coordinator. But as far as any big sweeping changes, Ebenstein knows they don’t necessarily need to be made.

“The biggest challenge for me is to put my staple on something that has been as successful and predominant as it has been,” Ebenstein said. “Also trying to let the players see there is a change, but at the same time balancing what Louisburg football historically has been about.

“If you stick to your core beliefs, you are going to be successful in staying consistent. Honestly, what Louisburg has been built on is what I have always valued and that is committing to what you are doing and have the belief that what we do works. There is no reason to change it if it is working.”

Ebenstein also believes a key to healthy program is staying involved with the community and he hopes his team can do that in many different ways.

“Once we get going and I can have meetings with the players, we are going to do some things to reconnect to the community a little bit,” he said. “Not that we haven’t in the past, but it hasn’t been a staple of what we have done. We will have an awards ceremony at the banquet, and to be in consideration for

those, a player has to meet a certain criteria and one of those is community service and giving back to the youth leagues and camps. I think it is very important to have that connection to your community.”

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## **Rizzo signs with Garden City Community College**



Louisburg senior Dustyn Rizzo signed his letter of intent to play football at Garden City Community College on Mar. 1 at LHS. Sitting next to Dustyn are his parents Matthew and Denyse. Standing is Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein and Kyle Littrell.

Following his final game as a Louisburg Wildcat, Dustyn Rizzo still felt the fire to play football.

Four months later, it is a fire that continues to burn strongly within Rizzo and he isn't about ready to leave the sport he loves behind. The Louisburg senior is ready to take the next step.

Rizzo signed his letter of intent to play at Garden City

Community College on March 1 in front of family and friends at LHS and he is excited for the opportunity to play at the next level.

“This is probably not an opportunity I am going to have as I get older,” Rizzo said. “I am going to have the chance to work the rest of my life, so I am going to take advantage of this right now and go ahead and go play and I am excited. I am not done with football yet.”

The Garden City junior college seemed like the right fit for Rizzo as he looked for an opportunity to play, get better and eventually move on to a bigger program at a four-year school.

When Rizzo took his visit to Garden City, he came away impressed with what the Broncbusters had to offer on and off the field. Garden City finished its 2016 campaign with an 11-0 record, including a 25-22 win over Arizona Western to win the NJCAA national championship.

“I really like how everything is close together in Garden City,” Rizzo said. “Most of my classes are in the same building so that is nice. It is great to see how much football means to that whole town. I went and visited and everyone is about football and the football life. The coaches are extremely serious about football and I like how they are honest about things. They aren’t going to sugar coat anything.”

Rizzo, who is currently at 235 pounds, hopes to use part of his time at Garden City to put on a bigger frame. The Broncbuster staff told Rizzo they wanted to use him on the defensive line, where he experienced success at Louisburg.

“I am more geared for defense because I am quicker, smaller and I feel like I can get through the line. I just like making plays,” Rizzo said.

“The reason I am going to Garden City is to make myself the



best football player I can become. I want to get the weight level and experience level where I can get acclimated to the game of college football. Hopefully I can play Division II somewhere down the line and make a name for myself.”



**Dustyn Rizzo earned all-league defensive line honors the last two seasons.**

Rizzo was a big part of the Wildcat defense the last two seasons as he was a two-time all-Frontier League player. Rizzo was a first-team defensive selection in 2015 and 2016 and he finished with 39 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble this past year.

He has also been an honorable mention all-state selection the

last two years. Rizzo attributes his success to the Wildcat football staff – more specifically former coach Kyle Littrell and assistant Robert Ebenstein.

“The coaches have been wonderful,” Rizzo said. “Littrell and Ebenstein being my line coaches have just helped me tremendously. When (Littrell) resigned, I think that everyone took a hard hit from that. I think it made us more resilient and we had a great season. Both guys have had a big impact on me.

“Football has been life-changing for me. It is hard and there might not be a sport, other than wrestling, that is harder. You learn life lessons and it is a brotherhood. Playing here was amazing. Freshman year wasn’t that great, but my sophomore year when I saw my first Friday night that was crazy. Every Friday night from then on I knew it was getting closer to ending and playing with these guys. Every practice needed to be top notch.”

Rizzo won’t be the only Wildcat joining the Garden City team as teammate Mason Koechner signed with Garden City in February. He knows having Koechner there will only make the transition that much easier.

“It is going to be nice to have someone there that I know,” Rizzo said. “We are going to room together and we have been playing football together forever. So it will be great knowing that I have a buddy down there with me and it will make easier. It will also make the six hour drive a lot easier too.”

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# Koechner to continue journey at Garden City



Louisburg High School senior Mason Koechner signed his letter of intent Wednesday to play football at Garden City Community College. Sitting next to Mason are his parents Scott and Beth Koechner. Standing (from left) are Louisburg football coaches Robert Ebenstein, Gary Griffin and Zach Livingston.

Playing at the highest level college football has to offer has always intrigued Mason Koechner.

The Louisburg High School senior has his sights set on competing at the Division I level – one day. His journey to reaching that goal is still ongoing, but Koechner took the next step Wednesday when he signed his letter of intent to play at Garden City Community College.

Koechner believes the junior college route will allow him to grow and get better at the game he loves.

“I am not ready right out of high school to play Division I, but I really think this will be a great stepping stone for me to get me where I want to go,” Koechner said. “Hopefully I can spend one or two years at Garden City and then be ready for bigger and better things.

“I really liked their coaching staff. They are really good guys and the campus itself is really nice. The coaches talked

to me and convinced me that they can get me to the next level and that is really what I want to do. I hope to play well at Garden City and then see what happens.”

Koechner, who was a Class 4A first-team all-state player on both sides of the ball, was a pivotal part of the Louisburg football team that finished the season with a regional championship. He played tackle on an offensive line that accounted for nearly 4,000 yards of total offense and led the Wildcats on the defensive side with 67 tackles, including a pair of sacks.



**Mason Koechner (right) will be ready to take on a new challenge with Garden City this coming fall.**

However, it is the offensive side he will continue to improve on in college. Koechner, who stands at 6-foot-2, is undersized to play the tackle position in college, so the Garden City



coaches have a different idea for him.

“For my size, the coaches want to put me at center since I am not as tall so that will be different since I played tackle in high school,” Koechner said. “If I want to go somewhere bigger, I won’t be able to do that as a tackle, but playing center I can get away with only being 6-foot-2 and they think that will be a great fit for me.”

Mason has also had a wealth of knowledge in his corner during the recruiting process – his brother Jared. Jared, also an LHS graduate, went the junior college route before eventually signing with a Division I program in the University of Alabama-Birmingham.

Jared has been there to guide Mason through it all and give him some words of wisdom when he has needed it.

“Jared is probably the one who has helped me the most with my decision,” Mason said. “He has been with me every step of the way. I am glad he has been there and he has helped me with what questions to ask and how it all works. He has been a big help for sure.”

However, football isn’t Mason’s only passion. He is currently the No. 2 ranked heavyweight in Class 4A and has a 30-1 record on the season for the Wildcat wrestling team.

Wrestling and football have worked hand-in-hand in helping Mason become a better all-around athlete.

“In wrestling, I know how to you use my body and other people’s bodies against them,” Mason said. “I have gone up against guys bigger and stronger than me, but I can still handle them. Wrestling teaches you a lot of mental toughness, which is really helpful when it comes to football. The coaches all say that they love recruiting wrestlers because there is a mental toughness about them and they know how to use their body in their favor.”

Although he will be preparing for college soon, Mason will not forget the time he spent in Louisburg and all those times under the Friday night lights.

“It is crazy,” he said. “I started playing in fifth grade, but time has gone by so fast. It feels a little weird signing for college, but it doesn’t seem like it should be here yet. I am ready to take this next step though.

“I have many awesome memories of this place. I wouldn’t want to grow up anywhere else than here in Louisburg. It is the best place to grow up and play football.”