

Brown earns state qualifying time in 200 IM



Louisburg sophomore Claire Brown earned a state qualifying time in the 200-yard individual medley Wednesday during the team's meet in Topeka. Brown also has a state consideration time in the 100 freestyle.

TOPEKA – Claire Brown has watched as her times have slowly, but surely been coming down throughout the girls swim season.

Now, those times are among some of the best in the state.

Brown, who is a sophomore at Louisburg High School, and a member of the Osawatomie-Paula-Louisburg girls swim team, earned a berth at the Class 5-1A state meet during last week's meet in Topeka.

Brown qualified for state in the 200-yard individual medley at the Topeka West Invitational on Wednesday at Hummer Sports Complex. She finished third in the event with a time of 2 minutes and 31 seconds.

"Claire is just a natural athlete," coach Ardy Dehdasht said. "She swims so effortlessly. It's quite the accomplishment to be a state qualifier as a sophomore, so that's something she should be very proud of."

She could very well qualify for state in another event. Brown currently has a state consideration time in the 100-yard freestyle and took fourth last week with a season-best time of

1:00.60.

The Miami County team finished eighth out of 12 teams during Wednesday's meet with 103.5 points. Washburn Rural won with 430 points and Topeka Seaman was second with 299.

They also had a couple other top 10 finishes in the meet.

The 200 medley relay team of Sydney Keaton, Abby Bradley, Brown and Ashley Branine was seventh overall with a season-best time of 2:19.

Addie Stuebner was ninth in the 100 backstroke in 1:19, while Brown, Keaton, Bradley and Branine were 10th in the 400 freestyle relay in 4:41.

Brown paces girls swim team at Turner, Hayden



Sophomore Claire Brown swims the breaststroke during a meet earlier in the season. The Louisburg swimmer won two events at Turner and helped relays to top five finishes.

Last week, the Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg girls swim team spent a lot of time in the water as it had back-to-back days of competitions.

It started last Tuesday at Turner and ended Wednesday at the

Topeka-Hayden Invitational.

The Miami County team finished fifth out of six teams with 270 points at the Hayden meet, which was held at Hummer Sports Complex. Manhattan won with 537 and Hayden was second at 473.5.

Sydney Keaton, Abby Bradley, Claire Brown and Ashley Branine provided one of the best finishes of the day. The 200-yard medley relay team finished second with a season-best time of 2:17.

Brown also had a big day in a pair of other events as she was second in the 500 freestyle in 6:19 and took third in the 200 freestyle in 2:17.

Keaton went on to take fourth in the 50 freestyle in 29.71, while Addie Stuebner was fifth at 29.93.

Branine, Bradley, Brown and Keaton ended the meet strong in the 400 freestyle relay as they finished fourth in a season-best 4:30.14.

The Miami County team also competed in a six-team event at Turner and took fourth with 266 points. Lansing won the meet with 595 and De Soto was second at 436.

Brown had another big day in the water as she won the 200-yard individual medley with a time of 2 minutes and 32 seconds and also captured 100 freestyle crown in 1:01.

Brown also joined Branine, Bradley and Keaton to take third in the 200 freestyle really in 1:58, and earlier finished fourth in the 200 medley relay in 2:18.

Stuebner (1:18) and Keaton (1:19) took fourth and fifth, respectively, in the 100 backstroke to round out the team's top five finishers.

Girls swim team begins season on good note



Sophomore Claire Brown swims the butterfly stroke of the 200-yard individual medley during the team's home opener on Mar. 31 in Osawatomie.

The Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg girls swim team has already faced some difficult competition through its first two meets to start the season and it was no more evident than its last event in Topeka.

The Miami County team traveled to the Topeka High Invitational at Hummer Sports Complex and squared off against teams from Washburn Rural, Shawnee Heights, Seaman, Hayden, Hays and Junction City.

In all, the girls more than held their own as they finished fifth overall during the April 8 meet with 247 points. Washburn Rural won with 485.

Sophomore Claire Brown had a strong day as she finished runner-up in the 100-yard butterfly in a time of 1 minute and 12 seconds. Brown also finished third in the 200-yard freestyle in 2:18.

Brown also teamed up with Sydney Keaton, Abby Bradley and Ashley Branine to take runner-up in the 200-yard freestyle

relay in 1:59.

Branine also went on to record a fifth-place finish in the 50 freestyle in 29.86. Keaton finished fifth in the 100 freestyle in 1:09.

Dana Mattison rounded out the top placers as she took fourth in the 500 freestyle in 7:15.

Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg opened its season at home in a quadrangular against Hayden, Piper and Fort Scott on Mar. 31.

The Miami County girls went on to finish third with 234 points. Hayden won with 295 and Piper was second with 262.

The 200 medley relay team of Branine, Keaton, Brown and Bradley won to open the meet in a time of 2:16.



Senior Sydney Keaton swims the breaststroke during the

Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg home meet in Osawatomie.

Keaton followed that up with a victory in the 100 freestyle in 1:08 and later finished fourth in the 100 breaststroke in 1:29.

Brown took third in the 200 individual medley in 2:38. Bradley (30.95) and Addie Stuebner (31.26) went on to take fourth and fifth, respectively, in the 50 freestyle.

Mattison was runner-up in the 500 freestyle with a time of 7:33. Bradley, Mattison, Stuebner and Libby Barnett went on to take fourth in the 200 freestyle relay in 2:07 and Stuebner (1:18) did the same in the 100 backstroke.

Branine took fourth in the 200 freestyle in 2:40 and Mattison was right behind her in fifth.

Brown, Keaton, Branine and Mattison ended the meet with a third place finish in the 400 freestyle relay in 4:36.

Boys swim team ends season with fifth straight league title



Senior Bridger Baus swims the 100 breaststroke during the Feb. 10 Independent League Championship in Osawatomie. Baus took

second in event and later won the 100 backstroke.

OSAWATOMIE – For the last four years, the Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg boys swim team has been able to celebrate at the end of the season and 2021 was no different.

The Miami County team finished first in the Independent League Championship for the fifth year in a row on Feb. 10 as it recorded 318 points and edged Piper by 22 points.

“I am very proud of every swimmer,” coach Ardy Dehdasht said. “They swam and trained their hearts out this season. We overcame some obstacles and challenges this season, but overall every swimmer had a personal record in multiple events, which makes me proud. We have big goals of state qualifying times for the next season.”

Individually, the Miami County team won five individual events and the lone senior, Bridger Baus, was a part of three of them.

Baus won the league title in the 100-yard backstroke by 14 seconds in a time of 1 minute, 3.81 seconds. He also finished third in the 100 butterfly in 1:04.

Braden Branine, Brayton Brueggen and Sam Johnson joined Baus in the 200-yard medley relay and won going away in 1:56.

Brueggen, Cole Brown, Cooper Hipp and Baus also captured the 400-yard freestyle relay title in 3:54, just two seconds ahead of runner-up Piper.

Brueggen, a Louisburg sophomore, also had a big day. Along with the two relays, he won the 500-yard freestyle in 5:58 and took runner-up in the 200 freestyle in 2:09.



Sophomore Brayton Brueggen won the 500-yard freestyle and finished second in the 200 freestyle on Feb. 10 during the league meet.

The Miami County team also captured the 200 freestyle relay title as Branine, Hipp, Brown and Drake Baus edged Piper by less than a second in 1:42.

"The swimmers deserve all the credit," Dehdasht said. "They come to practice everyday, swim and train hard and they saw the results. I have always said swimming is a thankless sport as you can train for weeks and sacrifice so much and you are lucky and having a good day you will drop a fraction of a second. They certainly made me very proud."

Several other swimmers also did well as Brown placed second in the 200 individual medley and Branine took third.

Johnson finished second and third in the 100 and 50 freestyle,

respectively. Hipp also placed third in the 100.



Braden Branine finished second in the 100 breaststroke during the Feb. 10 Independent League meet.

Branine placed second in the 100 breaststroke, while Drake Baus was second in the 500 freestyle and third in the 200 freestyle. Drake Burdine placed third in the 100 backstroke, while Luke Hebert was third in the 500 freestyle.

Although Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg did not qualify anyone for the state meet this season, the boys are already gearing up for next season.

“The boys made it as an alternate in a relay but unfortunately did not get to swim,” Dehdasht said. “Our goal is to have all relays and multiple individuals qualify for state next year.”

Boys swim team edges Bonner Springs in dual



Louisburg's Remington Rice swims the 50-yard freestyle during a meet earlier this season. Rice finished second in both freestyle races last week in Bonner Springs.

BONNER SPRINGS – In the two team meet on Feb. 2 at Bonner Springs, the Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg boys swim team found a lot of success.

The Miami County team won 10 of the 11 events and edged Bonner Springs for a 409-372 victory as the boys continued to put up strong times.

Sam Johnson had a big day as he won two individual events and was a member of two first place relay teams.

Johnson won the 50-yard freestyle in 24.66 seconds and also capture the 100 freestyle in 55.53.

Johnson, along with Bridger Baus, Cole Brown and Remington Rice, won the 200 freestyle relay in 1 minute and 42 seconds. Johnson, Brown, Luke Hebert and Cooper Hipp ended the meet with a win in the 400 freestyle relay in 3:54.

The team completed the sweep in the relays as Baus, Braden Branine, Rice and Hipp took first in the 200 medley relay in

1:54.



Cooper Hipp swims the breaststroke for the Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg swim team earlier this season.

Baus also won a pair of events as he took first in the 100 butterfly in 1:04.46 and later edged teammate Brayton Brueggen in the 100 backstroke in 1:05.24. Brueggen was second in 1:05.52.

Earlier in the meet, Brueggen won the 200 freestyle in 2:10 and Hebert was first in the 500 freestyle in 6:26.

Brown won the 200-yard individual medley in 2:30, while Branine was second about two seconds behind. Branine was also runner-up in the 100 breaststroke in 1:13.

Rice was second in the 50 and 100 freestyle to round out the top finishers for Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg.

Louisburg is back in action tomorrow when it hosts a meet at the OZone in Osawatomie. It is set to begin at 4 p.m.

Boys swim finishes runner-up at Blue Valley Northwest



Louisburg's Cole Brown swims the breaststroke during a meet earlier this season. Brown was a part of two relays that took second and third, respectively.

OVERLAND PARK – The Osawatomie-Paula-Louisburg boys swim team experienced success against some bigger programs last Tuesday.

The co-op team finished second at the Blue Valley Northwest quad as they tallied 169 points and defeated Shawnee Mission East (149 points) and De Soto (75). Blue Valley Northwest won going away with 407 points.

The Miami County team finished second in three events, including a pair of relays.

Bridger Baus, Braden Branine, Remington Rice and Cooper Hipp took second in the 200-yard medley relay in 1 minute and 57 seconds.

Rice, Sam Johnson, Baus and Cole Brown teamed up to finish second in the 400-yard freestyle relay in 3:56.

Individually, Rice also took runner-up in the 100 butterfly in 1:05.35 and was also fourth in the 50 freestyle in 24.91 seconds.

Sophomore Brayton Brueggen finished runner-up in the 500-yard freestyle in 6:01.55 and Bridger Baus was third in the 100 backstroke in 1:05.82.

Brown, Luke Hebert, Hipp and Sam Johnson went on to take third in the 200 freestyle relay in 1:48.83.

Louisburg is back in action Tuesday when it travels to Bonner Springs for a meet, which is set to start at 4:30 p.m.

Boys swim team finishes second at home meet



Louisburg's Drake Burdine swims the butterfly during the team's home meet last Wednesday at the OZone in Osawatomie.

OSAWATOMIE – In its first time back in the water in 2021, the Osawatomie-Paula-Louisburg swim team put together a strong showing in its home meet at the OZone in Osawatomie.

The boys finished second out of five teams with 459 points, while Topeka-Hayden was first with 558. Coffeyville, Independence and Fort Scott took third, fourth and fifth,

respectively.

"I thought the swimmers did an outstanding job," coach Ardy Dehdasht said. "I believe everyone of our swimmers had at least one season best record. Much of this is due to their hard work at the practices and I am certainly proud of all of them."

Paola's Sam Johnson had the most successful day for the team as he earned a state consideration time in the 50-yard freestyle. He finished second in the event with a time of 24.85 seconds. Johnson also finished second in the 100 freestyle with a personal-best time of 55.79.

Louisburg's Drake Baus took home the gold in the 500-yard freestyle as he won with a time of 6 minutes and 28 seconds.

The 200-yard freestyle relay team of Johnson, Cole Brown, Bridger Baus and Remington Rice also earned first place in 1:44.58.



Sophomore Brayton Brueggen swims the freestyle last Wednesday in Osawatomie. Brueggen won the 100-yard backstroke.

Louisburg sophomore Brayton Brueggen had his best race in the 100-yard backstroke where he recorded a time of 1:06.79, which eclipsed his seeding time by almost four seconds.

Another Louisburg sophomore, Braden Branine, took first in the 100-yard breaststroke in 1:13 and eclipsed his seed time by three seconds.

Osawatomie's Luke Hebert also set multiple personal records on the day.

It was also Senior Night as the boys celebrated their one senior teammate – Bridger Baus – as he was honored with his parents during the meet.

The team is back in the water tonight when it travels to Blue Valley Northwest for a meet. It is scheduled to start at 5 p.m.

Top Louisburg Sports Stories of 2020



There hasn't been a year like 2020, and for most people, they are ready to put it behind them and forget it ever existed.

Still, with all the challenges that 2020 brought, there were still plenty of positives to talk about when it came to Louisburg High School sports. History-making state places and state medals were plentiful on this list, but it wasn't all positive. Louisburg had to say goodbye to a beloved town figure and athletes had to deal with the loss of spring sports.

Below are the top stories from 2020, along with a brief explanation of each. Included in the explanation is the link to the actual story from the event.

When putting the list together, I took a lot of things into account – whether it was team vs. individual, popularity of the sport, historical achievements and the interest it drew on the web site. Thanks to the cancellation of spring sports, I don't have the top 10 like I normally do, but I got close.

This year was a blast to cover, when I had the opportunity, anyway. Still, I am looking forward to what 2021 will bring. Thank you for everyone's support and can't wait for it all to begin again.



8. Ratliff-Becher wins state powerlifting title

After winning a state championship in 2019 Reilly Ratliff-Becher had every intention of backing up her performance during the Class 4A State Powerlifting Championships on March 7 at Piper High School.

In fact, the Louisburg senior wanted to improve it. Last

season, Ratliff-Becher took first in everything but squat, which she got runner-up.

This time around, she got the clean sweep.

Ratliff-Becher took first in bench, squat and clean and that led to her second straight state championship in the 180-pound class.

“It means a lot to me that I was able to win the state title again,” Ratliff-Becher said. “I set a goal for myself to win first in everything since I had got second in squat last year and I achieved it. Even though it wasn’t my best showing with the numbers I got on my lifts.

“The competition was very good this year, as it always is. But, fortunately with all the work I put in to at least maintain my numbers from last year, meant I was able to lift bigger amounts than my competition.”



7. Conley named state and midwest coach of the year

After a third place finish to end the year, Louisburg boys

soccer coach Kyle Conley was recognized among the state's best.

Conley was named as the Class 4-1A Coach of the Year by the Kansas Soccer Coaches Association in November.

He guided the Wildcats to a 16-2 record on the season and the team's highest finish in program history when Louisburg ousted Rose Hill, 3-0, in the state third-place game.

Just a few weeks later, Conley was honored once again – this time on the girls' side.

Despite the lost season, the United Soccer Coaches wanted to recognize coaches for their past accomplishments and for what this past spring was supposed to hold.

Atop that list was Conley as he was named as the Small School Midwest Coach of the Year.

"I am absolutely honored to receive this award," Conley said. "There are so many great coaches in the Midwest, but to me this is a program award. None of this is possible without everyone involved; girls coming to work their tails off everyday, parents traveling and supporting us anywhere and everywhere, community helping with supporting the program, the school supporting the girls, etc. Without the support and buy in from the girls, parents and community none of this is possible."

The Wildcat girls program has had a successful start in its four years. Conley has a 54-22-2 record during that span, that included two state runner-ups and another state final four appearance.



6. Louisburg cheer places third at state

The Louisburg cheer squad had to do its postseason competition a little different this year thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It didn't seem to bother them much as the defending state champions found themselves right in the thick of things again.

Although they didn't repeat as champs, they were still among the state's best as the Wildcats cheerleaders finished third in the state back in November.

Unlike performing in front of judges like they did in 2019, the Wildcats had to video tape their performance and send it in to be judged. It fared well as they tallied 83.35 points to finish in the top 3.

Baldwin earned the state title with 88.85 points and Abilene was second with 85.25.

Members of the Louisburg cheer squad are Bella Feikert, Addison Drake, Brooklyn Harmon, Jayden Trester, Maddy Carpenter-Ross, Sophie Katzer, Sammy McDaniel, Julia Arriola, Andrea Gaza, JoJo Hendrickson, Sydney Dudzik, Abby Bradley, Anna Poe, Sienna Finch, Mable Graham, Audrey Anderson, Zoe Weers, Anna Morrison and Maggie Madison



5. Holtzen, Owens earn state medals for Wildcat wrestling

Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen both had their own agendas going into the state wrestling tournament.

Owens, qualified for state last year, but left without a win and he vowed to fix that this time around. As for Holtzen, he came up short in his efforts for a second state medal as a

sophomore last season and had all the motivation not to come home empty-handed again.

Both wrestlers more than made up for their rough patches a year ago.

Owens and Holtzen left Salina with a state medal during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships on Friday and Saturday at the Tony's Pizza Events Center.



Owens made it to the semifinals and wound up earning a fourth-place medal at 120 pounds, while Holtzen finished fifth at 126 pounds.

It also marked the first time since 2016 that Louisburg finished the season with multiple state medalists, when Nathan Keegan and Mason Koechner each brought home medals.

The Wildcats nearly had three medalists as sophomore Brandon Doles finished one win shy of a state medal at 160 pounds with a 2-2 record.



4. Dennis steps down as LHS team doctor

Almost every day of the week, if you were looking for Damon Dennis, he could be found at his office on 11 S. Broadway St., helping treat those pesky aches and pains, taking X-rays, or mending those beaten up athletes after a game.

Doc D – as he is affectionately known – opened Louisburg Chiropractic Office 28 years ago and has served as the

Louisburg High School athletic team doctor for almost that same amount of time.

Dennis has seen it all. The walls in his office are lined with mementos from his years of service to both the community and the high school.

He has taped thousands of ankles, seen even more patients and has touched many lives during his time in Louisburg. That is why this week is one of the more emotional times in his life.

In May, he left Louisburg Chiropractic Office and handed the reins over to Dr. Jake Polzin. Add to that, Dennis also stepped away as LHS' team doctor and left an absence on the sidelines and behind the mic that many in Louisburg have come to know.

"My decision to step down and sell the practice has turned out to be the hardest thing I have ever done," Dennis said. "I have poured everything I have into my job and community. It has become my entire existence. I was taught from a young age to serve others and your community. I feel like the pressures I have put on myself have become unhealthy. I have put about 40 years work in to 28 and feel like there is never going to be a good time to make such a huge life change.

"That being said, I feel like I need to make changes while I am still able to do the things that will be best for my family. Dr. Polzin came along and I think he will carry on the work at the office wonderfully. We are a lot alike in many ways. I could not have found anyone better to replace me."

For many, Dennis has been a big part of people's lives, especially in the athletic arena. He has served as the LHS team doctor since 1992 and has treated many athletes in those 28 years.



3. Girls Cross Country Takes Third at State

For 23 years, the Louisburg cross country program has been chasing a top three finish at the Class 4A meet.

The Wildcats have had several teams qualify, especially in the last few seasons, but have always come up short of their goal. Following Saturday's race in Wamego, the Wildcats can finally stop running after it.

The Louisburg girls put together an historic performance at the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships at Wamego Country Club. The Lady Cats earned a state plaque with a third place finish as they surpassed Buhler by eight points to record the school's first top three state finish.

Junior Reese Johnson, sophomores Claire Brown, Bree Gassman and Nova Ptacek, along with freshmen Lola Edwards, Maddy Rhamy and Erin Apple, will all go down in school history as they became the first Wildcat team to bring home state hardware.

"It means the world to me to be a part of the first team ever to place at state," Rhamy said. "Coming into the state meet, I was just hoping our team would be in the top half, so you could imagine my excitement when our team placed third. I didn't even know we made school history until our coaches told us."

Rhamy was one of two freshmen who earned top 10 finishes individually, along with Edwards. Rhamy finished eighth overall in 20 minutes and 58 seconds, while Edwards was right behind her in 10th in 21:02.

Junior Reese Johnson also garnered a state medal as she was 15th in 21:28 to help the Lady Cats to an historic performance.

It was a proud moment for many in the Louisburg program, and included in that is John Reece. The longtime Wildcat head coach was all smiles following his team's performance.

"It is 23 years the making," coach Reece said. "You always have the plans and goals to get to state and then you get a group to go to state and do something great. This year was one of those. With the Frontier League as tough as it is, and then getting third there, put it in our heads that maybe we could do this. They all went out and ran their races, and that just shows their grit and determination and who they are."

A week earlier, the Wildcats also made history as it was the first time in school history when they qualified the entire boys team to the state meet as they took third at regionals.



2. Boys Soccer Finishes Runner-Up At State

As the Louisburg players huddled around their state plaque, many of them looked at it in awe and wonder.

“Hey guys, we won this,” a player shouted.

The statement was obvious at the time, but nonetheless, their excitement was more than warranted.

For the first time in program history, the Louisburg boys soccer team brought home a plaque from the state final four as the Wildcats defeated Rose Hill, 3-0, on Saturday in the third place match of the Class 4-1A state tournament at Stryker Sports Complex in Wichita.

It was only the second time in school history that the Wildcats had it made it this far, with the other being in 2016, when they finished fourth.

“There are only six teams in the entire state that get to end their year with a win and we wanted to be one of those teams,” Louisburg coach Kyle Conley said. “We want to be able to hang up a banner on our field and we wanted a plaque so that no one can forget what these kids earned and what they did this season. I am so proud of all of them.”

It was a program defining moment for the Wildcats as they began the weekend searching for a state championship, but lost 2-0 to Bishop Miege on Friday in the semifinals. Still, recording the best finish in school history is nothing for someone to hang their head about, and the Wildcats came out Saturday wanting to make sure they brought some hardware home.

“It’s absolutely crazy to think about what we have accomplished this year, partly because I have only played soccer in high school,” senior captain Logan Faulkner said. “Bringing a state plaque back will just be a reminder of what we did and how we reached our goal.”



1. COVID-19 Cancels Spring Sports

In March, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly closed all schools for the rest of the 2019-20 school year due to the spread of COVID-19.

When most students hear school has been closed, especially in the winter, cheers erupt. In this case, however, the tone was much more somber – especially among the senior class.

Proms were canceled. Any plans they had for a graduation ceremony were put on hold, and for more than 30 seniors, their last opportunity at playing a sport at Louisburg High School was taken away.

In fact, close to 200 students were planning on participating in an activity in the spring, but with no school, the Kansas State High School Activities Association followed suit and canceled the spring season the day after Gov. Kelly's declaration.

Students, parents and coaches alike have had to come to grips that a season they had been looking forward to all year, was never going to happen. Tears flowed, walls were punched in frustration and some were left speechless.

There would be no game days, no Senior Nights and no postseason runs. Athletes had to figure out how to cope with this fact and it was a challenge for the Louisburg girls soccer, track and field, baseball, softball, golf and swim teams.

Many of those teams had big postseason aspirations after success in 2019 and were left wondering what could have been.

KSHSAA votes to start winter sports on time, will not allow spectators



The 2020-21 winter sports season may have a little different look than in the past, but there is one thing that will remain the same – the student athletes will be out competing.

During the Kansas High School Activities Association Board of Directors meeting Tuesday, the board voted in favor to have winter sports continue as scheduled by a 53-22 decision. The meeting was in response to the Executive Board's proposal last week to delay winter sport till Jan. 15.

Instead, schools around the state will be able to kick off their seasons in early December, and then after a moratorium for Christmas Break, can resume competition on Jan. 8. The basketball, wrestling and swim teams will also be able to have a full schedule of events, barring cancellations due to the spread of COVID-19.

"I'm extremely happy and relieved on how KSHSAA voted regarding winter sports being able to happen," Louisburg senior Megan Foote said. "Sports are extremely important to students as it not only helps with physical health, but also provides a release for mental health. Athletes can depend on sports to be an outlet for the troubling feelings they may have. As someone who struggles with mental health, I can vouch for how important sports are. Sports provide some of the best

memories and times a kid can have and I believe they're essential in today's world."

During the meeting, eight different people – from parents to physicians – spoke on behalf of letting competition resume and two of those were Louisburg parents Craig Holtzen and Jenny Diederich.

Holtzen, whose son Cade is a senior on the Wildcat wrestling team, gave opening remarks in which he tried to convey the importance of extracurricular activities, even during COVID-19 times.

"There is no evidence to suggest that kids are either super-spreaders or very susceptible to this virus to begin with," Holtzen said during the meeting. "I would dare go far enough to say that kids are practicing better virus protocol when they are in school or activities than when they are locked down.

"Fall activities were largely successful because of our ability to be flexible and adaptive to the many changing things that happened over that season."

The vote to let them play was a sigh of relief to many players and coaches around the state, who were already in the process of prepping for their season.

"This is great news for our kids," Louisburg boys basketball coach Ty Pfannenstiel said. "Our students and athletes have been so resilient this year with all the new protocols, so I'm happy for them to get their opportunity because they've been through a lot. There was a lot of concern among our kids, so I'm sure they're relieved now that the uncertainty has been resolved. We are definitely not out of the woods yet when it comes to setbacks, so we have to continue to do our part to stay safe and healthy throughout this season."

Following the decision by the executive board last week to

delay the start of winter sports, Diederich started a Facebook group called "Rally the Troops to Fight for Winter School Sports."

The page attracted more than 4,000 followers and advocated for parents and players to email and call the board of directors to let them know how important the winter season was for all of them. It seemed to work as the measure to allow them to play passed easily.

"Yesterday was a victory," Diederich said. "It was exactly what we were fighting for – a full season with 20 games that starts on time. I am as passionate as they come and would love to be in the stands but my main goal was to get my daughter and her teammates on the court. With all the uncertainty they need something to focus on and to look forward to. It is just as important mentally as it is physically. I was proud to be part of a group of families across the state that fought for all our student athletes and scholars. I think it taught our kids to use their voice."

Although many of the teams were already gearing up for the season, there has always been a cloud hanging over the programs whether the season was going to happen or not. Now, those players and coaches can resume with more confidence.

"I'm very grateful for the chance to get the kids back on the mat," Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird said. "All year I've been wondering about the unknowns, whether we'll get a season or not. But we've been practicing for a week and a half, and things are feeling more like normal than they have all year."

"This season, we've got the theme 'Relentless,' and that's the mindset we're trying to implement. Things like the KSHSAA ruling, the potential to get quarantined, and more are the obstacles in the way of our success. We've got to be relentless and work together to find ways around them."

The meeting was bittersweet for most parents as the board of directors voted that the athletic events will be held without spectators on both the high school and middle school levels. The measure passed by a 50-26 vote and spectators will not be allowed from Dec. 1 to Jan. 28.

Following that time, fan attendance will be limited in accordance with local attendance policies.

"I believe we had a solid plan to allow fans to attend our games in a safe manner," USD 416 superintendent Dr. Brian Biermann said. "We had already had indoor sports for middle school girls' basketball and middle school wrestling and it was working well. Now, that fans are not allowed, we will strive to provide our fans a quality livestream option to allow them to cheer on our Wildcats.

"I am glad that the board of directors decided to allow our kids to participate in sports. Our coaches and student-athletes have adhered to every possible safety measure. I know our kids are excited to represent the Wildcats on the mat, court and swimming pool in the upcoming weeks.

From some players' point of view, while getting to play their season was the most important outcome from Tuesday's meeting, the fact of not having their parents there is tough to comprehend.

"Basketball is a momentum sport and fans are a huge part of that," Foote said. "I believe we have one of the best student sections for girls' basketball. When we get into a rough patch, our student section gets louder and helps us out of that. I also have a lot of family that is extremely supportive and loves to watch me play. Not having them there is gut wrenching, especially my dad. Having my parents and family there is huge to me.

"Sadly, this is what it has come to. Right now all we can do is work together as a team and be each other's support system.

We have to depend on each other to be loud and hype each other up. I still hold hope that this unreasonable ruling will be turned around, but I'm incredibly grateful that I can have one last season with my best friends."

Not only players, but coaches having to instruct their players in an empty gymnasium will take some getting used to as well.

"I am so happy for the student athletes who get to play winter sports and I am super excited to see what this season brings," Louisburg girls basketball coach Adrienne Lane said. "Basketball is an extracurricular activity, but it is also a chance for these students to come together and be a team. Playing in an empty gym will be a change, but I think the athletes will mainly be grateful for their opportunity to play."

Even though some parents will have to get used to watching their child on the computer or television, instead of in-person, they are hoping they will be able to back in the gym sooner rather than later.

"I was a little surprised with the no fan policy as I think blanket policies are not good for Kansas," Diederich said. "We have districts of so many sizes and local decision making is best. Districts know what they can and cannot handle. Hopefully we can convince KSHSAA to loosen the policy to allow for 1-2 immediate family members, but for now just be happy with the fact that they are playing at all."

KSHSAA proposes delay for winter sports



The 2020-21 winter sports season in Kansas could be delayed or reduced depending on the vote at the Nov. 24 Kansas State High School Activities Association Board of Directors meeting

During the KSHSAA Executive Board meeting Wednesday the board reviewed data on the impact of COVID-19 on activity programs around the state due to the rising number of positive cases and impact on the health care system.

The board unanimously approved a proposal from the KSHSAA staff to suspend competitions until Jan. 15, 2021 and extend the winter moratorium. That proposal is now in front of the KSHSAA Board of Directors, who will vote on the issue at 1 p.m. on Nov. 24. The board of directors has members from every league across the state.

One of those board of directors, Paola High School principal Jeff Hines, was caught off-guard by the news.

"I consider myself pretty up to date when it comes to issues with KSHSAA, but I had no idea this was happening yesterday," Hines said. "I was in an administrator meeting that started at 10 a.m. and at 10:01 I received an email from KSHSAA with the executive board agenda for a meeting that had already started. This is a pretty important issue and I wanted to speak at the board meeting, but was told I couldn't because the meeting had already started."

“I asked someone at KSHSAA why the agenda was posted sooner, and they said it was posted last week. I have searched the internet and I couldn’t find it. I have no doubt that they did post somewhere, but they need to make it more accessible so there can be more discussion on the issue. I was surprised the issue came up.”

The proposal which will be put up for a vote is as follows:

- Delay competitions for all winter activities until Friday, January 15.
- Allow virtual competition only in Debate and Scholars Bowl.
- Winter activity practice may continue where appropriate to do so through December 22. All KSHSAA risk mitigation protocols strictly enforced.
- Extend Winter Moratorium. Dec. 23 – Jan. 3; practices to resume Jan. 4; restrictions eliminate contact between coach/athlete/school and no school facility use.
- Tentative resumption of competition on January 15.
- No fans for competition, January 15-28.
- Limited fans Jan. 29 through remainder of winter competitions.
- Mandatory universal masking with exception to athletes in competition and officials during live action.
- No invitational tournaments.

High School Competition Limits:

- Basketball maximum 13 games per team.
- Bowling maximum 8 days per team/individual.
- Swimming and Diving maximum 6 competitions per athlete.

- Wrestling maximum 12 events, 20 competition point max.

Middle School Restrictions:

- No competition in December, practice only.
- No competition Jan. 1 – Jan. 14
- No events with more than three schools participating.
- Strongly encourage skill development.
- Strongly encourage intramural play only.
- Limit two fans per player starting Jan. 15.

As far as how the board of directors will vote on the issue, Hines isn't quite sure how it will go, but he doesn't believe the executive board was trying to sneak the issue past anyone.

"You can have two thoughts on the issue," Hines said. "One, all of the executive board members think delaying winter sports is a great idea. That is an option, I guess. Or two, all of the members thought this issue was too big for them to decide on and wanted to make sure to get input from all its members and allowing them to make that decision. I tend to think that is what they are doing here."

"Will there be some people that vote yes to delay sports? Yeah I think there will be, just because of the situation their districts are in, but I tend to think a majority of them will vote no. Just as far as how I will be voting, I will vote no because I think that each school board should be able to decide whether or not to have winter sports. They know their district better than anyone. That is what we did for the fall and I believe the same thing should happen here."

Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird understands the concern with the rising number of COVID-19 cases across the state, but he knows there will also be an impact on the

student athletes if these activities are delayed.

"I totally understand why KSHSAA is considering taking action, but it worries me because a delay in starting competition could put us on the path to canceling the winter season altogether," Bovaird said. "There have been wrestling tournaments happening across the nation since mid-July, and there have been very few cases traced back to the tournaments themselves. Coaches, wrestlers, officials, and tournament directors are taking precautions, and I hope that we're able to continue doing what they've been doing.

"I'm afraid that a reduction in the number of competitions allowed would only further harm the kids in the sport. I get it, though. Covid-19 is real and we're constantly reacting to it and rethinking how we can best protect our kids' health. While we may be protecting kids and their families from the potential of infection, we would also be taking away opportunities where kids can learn invaluable lessons and come together as a team to bond in ways that you can't get through the classroom, and we would be doing some considerable harm to their mental health."

KSHSAA's decision to potentially delay winter sports came on the same day Gov. Laura Kelly issued a new executive order on face masks after Kansas reported more than 5,800 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday.

Since the news broke, Hines has been hearing from people all over the area, who are voicing their concerns.

"There are a lot of people who are worried that their kids' season might not happen, and I get that, but I would say that people need to temper their venom at the state association," Hines said. "I think it's is great that people are contacting their board of directors and letting people know their feelings, and we want to hear from those who are concerned. At the end of the day, I believe they will do the right thing for

these kids.”

As for Louisburg High School itself, administrators will be ready to implement any rules necessary as they hope the students get to play a full season.

“My reaction was to the kids and coaches it would affect who look forward to sports and saw their peers and themselves play in the fall with accommodations, only to be potentially denied their opportunity for a full season,” Louisburg activities director Michael Pickman said. “I understand the reasoning of the KSHSAA board, but I also understand the views of those who don’t want to see any changes. Luckily it is in the discussion phase and perhaps they will find a way for the kids to play while implementing some guidelines for keeping it safe, such as no fans.

“Whether Dec. 4 or Jan. 15 as proposed for starting competitions, we are still going to work to make it a safe environment for all and to limit risk. I am not in the medical field, so I won’t pretend to know if the delay will help lower the numbers. If it passes, then I hope that it does. Still, we won’t have a cure and will have the same need to implement safety protocol Jan. 15 as we would Dec. 4.”

“I want our students to have the opportunity to play and play safely, so my main concern right now is that the policies the district and athletic department have put in place are well thought out and followed,” Pickman added. “I think if we commit to following safety practices, we can still slow the spread regardless of the results of next week’s discussion and decisions by the KSHSAA board.”