

Wildcat track teams finish in top 3 at Belton



Senior Chloe Renner lands in the long jump pit during the Show-Me Showdown Invitational on Friday at Belton High School. Renner finished with three medals on the day, including a first-place finish in the high jump.

BELTON, Mo. – It may have been just the second meet of the season, but the Louisburg High School boys and girls track and field teams took a big leap forward.

During the Show-Me Showdown Invitational on Friday at Belton High School, the Wildcat boys finished second in the team standings with 156 points behind champion St. James Academy, which had 209 points.

The Wildcats won six events and 13 individuals or relays finished in the top three to earn medals.

“I was very pleased with the way we competed,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “We had some good performances and some not so good, but the way we competed was great to see.”

On the girls’ side, the Lady Cats also put together a strong performance as they finished third overall with 102.5 points behind champion St. James Academy (207.5) and runner-up Holden, Mo. (182.5).

Louisburg took first in two events and the Lady Cats finished

in the top three six times.

“I was very pleased with our overall performance,” Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said. “To finish third out of 10 teams was good for us. We have a lot to work with as a team and I am very excited for some nice weather to see how we compete throughout the season.”

Senior Ben Hupp and sophomore Chris Williams each finished with three gold medals – one individual and two on relays.

Williams won the 400-meter dash in 52.45 seconds and was the anchor leg on the 4×400-meter relay that finished first in 3:42.62, just .01 seconds ahead of runner-up St. James. Hupp, Blue Caplinger and Tanner Belcher each got the relay off to a good start.

Wyatt Reece, Williams, Hupp and Belcher also teamed up to win the 4×800-meter relay in 8 minutes and 48 seconds. Later on, Hupp won the 300-meter hurdles for the first this season in 43.65 seconds.

“Ben is one of the hardest workers on the team in all sports and it is nice to see him reap the rewards of his hard work,” Griffin said. “We stuck a lot of relays together and did not have a lot of time to work on exchanges, so overall I was happy with the way they all ran. We scored good points in all of the relays.



Senior Ben Hupp clears the final hurdle during the 300-meter hurdles Friday in Belton. Hupp won the event in 43 seconds.

“The 4×400 was really exciting. Chris kind of let up at the end, but we still pulled it out. He learned that you can’t let up until the race is over.”

The sprint medley relay team of Austin Moore, Jackson Ewalt, Quinn Rigney and Blue Caplinger also won first in 1:45.

The 4×200 relay of Will Ridley, Ewalt, Moore and Rigney finished in 1:38.92, while Caplinger, Ewalt, Rigney and Moore took third in the 4×100 relay in 46.65 seconds.

Following his run in the 4×800, Reece had a strong performance in the 1,600-meter run as he won in a time of 4:55 – his best of the season.

“We have been waiting for Wyatt to break out for a while and

hopefully this is a springboard for the rest of the year,” Griffin said. “He ran really well in both of his races.”

Also on the track, Rigney ran a time of 11.55 seconds to finish second in the 100-meter dash that featured cool, windy conditions.

In the field events, pole vaulters Frankie Hurst, Blue Caplinger and Trent Martin finished second, third and fourth, respectively. Hurst came up big after he cleared 11 feet, while Caplinger and Martin, recorded a height of 10-6, and 10-0, respectively.

“The vaulters scored big points for us and they will keep getting better as the year goes on,” Griffin said. “Frankie made a huge step up from the last meet and Blue no-heighted on the last meet so what he vaulted was great.”



Junior Wyatt Reece leads a pack of runners in the 1,600-

meter run. Reece won the event with a time of 4:55.

In the throws, senior T.J. Dover finished runner-up in the discus with a throw of 138-8. Matt Holloway also finished second in the javelin with a throw of 112-1.

Chloe Renner had a big day on the girls side as she finished the day with three medals, including a gold in the high jump. The Louisburg senior cleared 4-10 to win the event and later finished third in the long jump (16-0) and triple jump (31-2).

Junior Isabelle Holtzen also came out on top in the pole vault. Holtzen made a big improvement off her last meet and finished first after she cleared 9-0.

“I thought Chloe had a great day and if she can keep working hard and take full advantage of her potential she could have a very good year and win some medals at state,” Darrington said. “I was very happy with Isabelle and she showed how tough she is mentally by performing well in some adverse conditions.”



Louisburg's Jordon Leach takes off during a relay Friday in Belton.

On the track, the Lady Cats also took second in a pair of events.

The 4×400 relay of Kaitlyn Gaza, Kaitlyn Urban, Mikayla Quinn and Holtzen finished runner-up to end the meet with a time of 4:35.

Freshman Sydni Keagle led Louisburg in the 100-meter hurdles as she took second in 17.69 seconds.

"I am very excited about Sydni and Haley Cain both in the 100 and 300 hurdles," Darrington said. "It has been a couple of years since we have had some girls competing at a high level in the hurdles. I like the fact that we have three young girls, including Kristen Bell, competing and practicing the hurdles."

Other results are:

BOYS

100 dash: Charlie Koontz, ninth, 12.06

800 run: Tanner Belcher, fourth, 2:15.31; Jarod Rose, sixth, 2:19.18

1,600 run: Rose, eighth, 5:21.95

3,200 run: Wyatt Reece, fourth, 10:55; Jacob Benne, seventh, 12:12

300 hurdles: Scott Murphy, fifth, 47.12

Medley relay: Thomas Arnett, Koontz, Murphy, Rose, fourth, 4:19

Shot put: T.J. Dover, fourth, 44-1; Matt Holloway, sixth, 39-4.5; Hunter Day, 15th, 32-10

Discus: Kiefer Tucker, fifth, 103-2; Day, 11th, 94-8

Javelin: Tucker, seventh, 84-7.

Pole vault: Trent Martin, fourth, 10-0

Long jump: Kyle Allen, 11th, 16-0; Frankie Hurst, 15th, 15-1.5; Martin, 15th, 15-1.5

GIRLS

100 dash: Jordon Leach, 11th, 14.07

200 dash: Kaitlyn Gaza, ninth, 29.69; Leach, 11th, 30.28

400 dash: Mikayla Quinn, fourth, 1:08.15; Isabelle Holtzen, seventh, 1:09.21; Gaza, 11th, 1:11.72

800 run: Shaylor Whitham, ninth, 3:01

1,600 run: Alex Miller, 12th, 7:11

3,200 run: Miller, eighth, 16:25

100 hurdles: Haley Cain, seventh, 19.68; Kristen Bell, eighth, 19.83

300 hurdles: Cain, fifth, 55.92; Sydney Keagle, seventh, 58.65; Kristen Bell, ninth, 1:07

4×100 relay: Leach, Keagle, Cain, Kaitlyn Urban, 55.99

4×200 relay: Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Eileen Benne, Leach, fifth, 2:01

Sprint medley relay: Chloe Renner, Avery Graham, Tomi Frederes, Whitham, fifth, 2:13

Medley relay: Keagle, Frederes, Cain, Whitham, sixth, 5:22

Shot put: Ellie Katzer, fifth, 26-8; Lexie Reece, ninth, 25-3; Eden Strumillo, 18th, 22-0

Discus: Katzer, fourth, 89-3; Reece, fifth, 87-4; Strumillo, 15th, 57-7

Javelin: Melia Rice, 13th, 53-7

High jump: Benne, fourth, 4-6

Long jump: Urban, 12th, 13-2.5

Triple jump: Urban, fifth, 29-9; Benne, ninth, 26-9.5

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 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 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.”

Dover leads Wildcat track with discus title in opener



DE SOTO – It was a cold, wet and dreary start to the Louisburg track and field season, but the Wildcats were still able to find success despite the undesirable weather conditions.

Louisburg competed in the Leavenworth Invitational on Tuesday that was held at De Soto High School and the Wildcats left with seven top three finishes – five of which came on the boys side.

Senior T.J. Dover led the Wildcats as he won his first competition of the season. Dover finished first in the discus with a throw of 138 feet, 9 inches.

“Overall I was pleased with the effort,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “Competing one day after coming off of

spring break is not ideal, and it was cold, but I thought we competed well. T.J. had some good marks for early in the year, and he will keep getting better and better.”

Dover continued his success in the throws as he finished third in the shot put with a toss of 46-1.25.

Also in the field events, freshman Trent Martin had a strong performance in the pole vault in his first varsity meet as he finished second after he cleared 10-6.

On the track, sophomore Chris Williams ran a strong time in the 400-meter dash and finished second in 53.74 seconds. Williams also helped the 4×800-meter relay of Tanner Belcher, Ben Hupp and Owen Staver to a third-place finish in 8 minutes and 51 seconds.

“Chris ran the 4×800, the 400 and 4×400, which is a lot early in the year and I thought he ran well,” Griffin said. “Trent did a nice job in the pole vault and I did not think being in his first varsity meet bothered him at all.”

Junior Isabelle Holtzen led the Lady Cats as she finished second in the pole vault after she cleared 7-6. The 4×800 team of Reilly Alexander, Shaylor Whitham, Alex Miller and Payton Shaffer was third in 12:01.

In the team standings, the Louisburg boys finished sixth with 49.5 points and the girls took sixth with 26.5 points.

“I feel the meet went well for us,” girls coach Greg Darrington said. “I know the girls are a little disappointed with the results, but we had some girls that were really competitive. We have some time and I know we will get much better as we get into shape. It was tough on the girls with only one practice after spring break. I am looking forward to Friday and can’t wait to see how we compete with a full squad after only taking 13 girls for this meet.”

Louisburg returns to action Friday when it travels to Belton (Mo.) for the Show-Me Showdown.

Other results from the meet are:

BOYS

100 dash: Quinn Rigney, 13th, 12.10; Will Ridley, 14th, 12.10; Jackson Ewalt, 18th, 12.18; Austin Moore, 21st, 12.52

200 dash: Rigney, ninth, 24.61; Ewalt, 15th, 25.36; Moore, 18th, 25.65; Ridley, 22nd, 26.15

400 dash: Blue Caplinger, 13th, 57.19

800 run: Tanner Belcher, fourth, 2:12; Owen Staver, ninth, 2:19

1,600 run: Wyatt Reece, seventh, 5:03; Tim Smith, ninth, 5:05; Jacob Benne, 15th, 12:31

3,200 run: Smith, 12th, 11:13; Reece, 13th, 11:45; Benne, 15th, 12:31

300 hurdles: Hupp, fifth, 44.37

4×100 relay: Caplinger, Moore, Ewalt, Rigney, fifth, 46.33

4×400 relay: Belcher, Caplinger, Hupp, Chris Williams, fourth, 3:49

Pole vault: Frankie Hurst, fifth, 8-6

Long jump: Kyle Allen, 18th, 17-3; Hurst, 20th, 16-6; Trent Martin, 24th, 15-2

Triple jump: Allen, seventh, 36-7.5; Kristopher Light, eighth, 34-6

GIRLS

100 dash: Jordon Leach, 15th, 14.41; Tomi Frederes, 26th, 16.09

200 dash: Leach, 13th, 30.49; Frederes, 18th, 34.11

400 dash: Mikayla Quinn, fourth, 1:06.23; Reilly Alexander, 12th, 1:16

800 run: Payton Shaffer, 12th, 2:51; Shaylor Whitham, 15th, 2:59

3,200 run: Whitham, 12th, 14:44

4×400 relay: Quinn, Alexander, Kaitlyn Urban, Isabelle Holtzen, fourth, 4:43

Shot put: Ellie Katzer, 14th, 26-2.5; Lexie Reece, 15th, 26-0

Discus: Reece, fifth, 95-4; Katzer, eighth, 86-9

High jump: Chloe Renner, fifth, 4-8; Eileen Benne, seventh, 4-6

Long jump: Renner, seventh, 14-10; Benne, 17th, 13-2; Urban, 18th, 12-5.5

Triple jump: Urban, fifth, 29-8.5; Renner, eighth, 28-8.5; Benne, ninth, 28-6.5

Wildcat track hopes for big season



Louisburg High School sophomore Chris Williams is one of several returning state qualifiers for the Wildcat track and field team this season. Williams finished ninth at state in the 400-meter dash last season.

The Louisburg High School track teams return their fair share of experience in what the Wildcat coaches hope will be a successful 2017 season.

Between the boys and girls squads, Louisburg brings back three regional champions and several state qualifiers from last season. It is a good starting point for this year as the Wildcats look to try and bring home a state medal after coming up short a year ago.

On the boys side, the Wildcats have 35 athletes out this season, including a pair of individual state qualifiers and three relay teams that earned a spot at the state meet last May.

Like every season, the Wildcats have had to battle with spring break and inconsistent weather to try and get practices in, but they have made progress.

“Things have been going well,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “We have some quality kids coming back,

including several relay members from last year.”

One of those individuals is senior T.J. Dover, who won the regional title in the discus a year ago and will look to lead a young group of throwers this season. He finished 11th at state last season, just a few spots away from a medal.

“Because basketball went longer than normal and spring break, T.J. has not had a lot of practice time, but we are expecting him to have a good year,” Griffin said. “T.J. is the only senior thrower and hopefully some younger kids will come along as the year goes by.”

Sophomore Chris Williams will look to lead the Wildcats on the track. Williams, who did a lot of the sprints last season, qualified for state in the 400-meter dash and finished one spot from a state medal as he took ninth.

Williams’ role on the team will be a little different this time around as he will run the 400 dash and 800-meter run and Griffin is excited for what his season could hold.

“I think he has the potential to be a state champion,” Griffin said. “Chris came into practice with confidence and his conditioning is pretty good this early in the season. I expect big things from him.”

The Wildcats will also try and send all three of their relay teams to state after qualifying two last season. Williams will join the 4×800-meter relay of the combination of Wyatt Reece, Tanner Belcher, Owen Staver and Ben Hupp. Reece, Belcher and Hupp all ran on the team at state last year.

On the 4×400 team, Williams will join a combination of Blue Caplinger, Hupp, Belcher and Scott Murphy, while Quinn Rigney, Austin Moore, Jackson Ewalt and Caplinger will compete in the 4×100 relay.

Rigney, Moore, Ewalt, Caplinger, Murphy and Will Ridley will

compete in the sprints this season for Louisburg.

Juniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith, who both qualified for state in cross country earlier this year, will look to translate that success over to the track in the long distance races. Belcher, Staver and Hupp will run in the middle distance, while Hupp will also compete in the hurdles.

In the field events, juniors Kyle Allen and Kristopher Light also return to help lead the Wildcats in the jumps.

As for the girls, the Lady Cats return a pair of regional champs from a season ago in senior Chloe Renner and junior Isabelle Holtzen. In all, they have 27 girls out for track this year.

“Even though the numbers are down I have girls out that want to be here and I think we could be okay,” Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said.



Louisburg junior Isabelle Holtzen hopes to make another state appearance in the pole vault for the Wildcats this season.

Renner comes back for one more season as she won a regional title in the triple jump last year and will lead the Lady Cats in the jumps.

Holtzen also won a regional title last season as she won the pole vault before coming up one spot short of a state medal

last season. She will also concentrate on running in some sprints as well to help her in the vault.

“Isabelle is working hard and I think her doing some sprinting events will help her speed and get her to some new personal records,” Darrington said. “She is working hard and I know with her mindset this year she expects more out of herself. I really feel she will be a medal contender at the state meet.”

The Lady Cats also return several others in the field events from last year’s team. Throwers Ellie Katzer and Lexie Reece will compete in the discus, while Kaitlyn Urban also hopes to have a good year in the jumps.

“I think Kaitlyn Urban has worked hard in the off season and she looks to be more competitive and score points for the team,” Darrington said. “Lexie and Ellie have a chance to earn points for the team this year as well.”

On the track, the Lady Cats return most of the 4×400-meter relay team that qualified for state last season. Kaitlyn Gaza, Reilly Alexander, Jordon Leach and Mikayla Quinn will lead the Lady Cats.

As for the other two relays, those will be pieced together as the season goes along.

“The 4×100 will have to rely on some younger runners and I am sure Coach (Gary) Griffin will get them ready by mid-year,” Darrington said. “Coach (John) Reece will have to rebuild the 4×800 team as a lot of those girls from last year’s team made the choice of not coming back out. We will find someone to compete and make a competitive relay team with what we have out.”

Both Louisburg teams will open their season Tuesday when they compete in the Leavenworth Invitational, which is hosted at De Soto High School. On Friday, the Wildcats will be in action again, this time at Belton (Mo.) High School for another

invitational.

Griffin receives honor from track coaches association



Louisburg High School track and field coach Gary Griffin was recently honored with the Longevity Award from the Kansas Cross Country and Track Coaches Association. The award honors a coach who has spent more than 30 years coaching one of the two sports.

Coaches and athletes have come and gone from the Louisburg High School track and field program over the last three decades, but one constant has remained.

Gary Griffin has spent the last 30 years coaching the Wildcat track and field team to numerous state meets, state medals and a team state championship. His dedication to the sport hasn't gone unnoticed and he was recognized for it earlier this month.

On Feb. 15, a representative with the Kansas Cross Country and Track Coaches Association traveled to Louisburg to present

Griffin with the 30 Years of Coaching Longevity Award, which is given to those who have coached one of the two sports for 30 years or longer.

“It means a lot to me that they took the time to drive down and get here by 8 a.m. to present me with this award,” Griffin said. “Really, though, it just means that I’ve coached for a long time.”

Although 30 years may seem like an eternity to some people, for Griffin time has flown by as he enters his 18th year as the head boys track coach. He also spent five years as the girls track coach before that and was an assistant under previous head coaches Aaron Webb and Kris Kehl for several seasons.



Louisburg coach Gary Griffin (left) receives his award from a member of the Kansas Cross Country and Track Coaches

Association on Feb. 15 at Louisburg H

“I love track because for the most part you get out of it, what you put into it,” Griffin said. “Even the most talented athletes have to work hard to be a state champion. Also I have had the pleasure to coach with others that are very passionate about track like Aaron Webb and Tom Kuder and a lot of others that I have learned a great deal from.”

Griffin guided Louisburg to the school’s first state title in 2011 when the Wildcats tied Baldwin for first place. His son Garrett won the Class 4A state javelin title and also medaled in the 110-meter high hurdles.

Mark Sitek medaled at state in the 100-, 200- and 400-meter dashes that season as did Jake Albright (pole vault), Alex Gentges (javelin) and Alex Bell (discus).



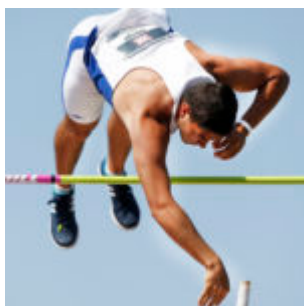
Gary Griffin has spent the last 18 years as the Louisburg High School boys track and field coach.

That was one of many special seasons for Griffin as he has had the chance to coach a number of state champions and medalists.

“The state championship was a great memory but there are really too many to remember,” he said. “It was a lot of fun being a part of Garrett’s track career and watching him be

successful. I really don't know how many state champions or medalist we have had since I have been here, but we have had our share. We have had a ton of talented kids over the years, and many have gone on to have great college careers as well."

Albright soars atop pole vault rankings



Kansas senior Jake Albright set a new personal best in the pole vault after he cleared 18 feet, 2 inches during a meet on Jan. 21 in Lexington, Ky. Albright's mark put him at No. 1 in the NCAA pole vault rankings at the time.

LAWRENCE – Jake Albright took off down the runway, planted his pole and vaulted into the air.

As he cleared his personal best mark, Albright nonchalantly grabbed his pole and went to talk to his coach. Sitting from afar, you couldn't tell that the University of Kansas senior had set a career best, much less the best mark in the nation.

During the Rod McCravy Memorial on Jan. 21 in Lexington, Ky., Albright cleared 5.54m (18 feet, 2 inches) to finish first – and in the process – soared atop the NCAA Division I pole vault leaderboard and is currently 15th on the 2017 world list.

That mark earned Albright the Big 12 Conference Men's Track and Field Athlete of the Week honor as the Louisburg High School graduate is off to a great start in his final season with the Jayhawks.

"I have never really had much of an external reaction when I clear a personal best," Albright said. "When I made 5.54m I clapped twice, picked up my pole, and walked over to my coach to talk about the next bar. Inside I felt very excited, but I had to get ready to attempt the next height of 5.62m. I knew I could accomplish this indoors, but I was surprised it was this early."

Albright was a little stunned due to the fact he was dealing with an illness for nearly a month. He was diagnosed with mononucleosis over Christmas break and it lasted from early December to early this month.



Laura Jacobsen / University of Kansas Jake Albright

currently holds the fourth-highest pole vault mark in Jayhawk history.

Apparently it takes more than that to slow Albright down as this was the second time in seven days that he cleared 18 feet and claimed his third victory of the season. It was also the fourth-best mark in Jayhawk history.

“The vaulters did extremely well, but Jake was unbelievable,” Jayhawk coach Stanley Redwine said in a release. “It just seemed like he could do no wrong and I’m excited to see what he’s going to do the rest of this year because he’s only going to continue to get better.”

Albright needed seven tries to get over his first four bars of the competition before needing all three attempts to push past a new career best of 5.54.

“It feels great, but that may easily change,” Albright said of the No. 1 ranking. “There are some guys that I know can jump 5.54m-plus this indoor season, including some of my teammates. I am just excited that the 5.54m mark will most likely get me to the Indoor National Championships where I can compete against the best in the NCAA.”

On Jan. 29, Albright was knocked off the No. 1 spot by a half-inch by South Dakota freshman Chris Nilsen, but Albright is still excited for what the future holds as the Jayhawk men are currently No. 11 in the NCAA Division I rankings.

The Jayhawk senior has already established himself as one top vaulters – not only in the Big 12 Conference – but in the NCAA as well.

Albright won the Big 12 pole vault title during the outdoor season last May after he cleared 18-0.5 and has experience on the big stage as he finished 10th in the NCAA Division I Outdoor Championships in 2015.

“I won conference because my teammates were jumping so well at that meet,” Albright said. “They had many first attempt clearances, so in order to win I had to jump a higher bar. It feels great to compete with such a great pole vaulting squad that we have at KU. Conference was a large confidence boost, and I definitely worked harder after that.”

Following the conference meet in May, Albright competed in the Division I West Preliminary, but didn’t record a mark and was unable to get back to the NCAA Championships. That feeling stuck with Albright in the offseason and he, and the rest of his teammates, are ready to make amends this year in both seasons.

“In the West prelim, it just came down to pole selection,” Albright said. “I was trying to use bigger poles than I should have, and ended up coming up shallow in the pit each time. With all the potential we had it was hard not seeing any KU vaulters qualify for outdoor NCAA’s last year. We are definitely back with a chip on our shoulder.”

Top 10 stories of 2016



Here are the Louisburg Sports Zone Top 10 Stories of the Year. In each brief explanation of the story, there will be a link to the full story of when the event actually happened. Thanks again for a successful 2016 and I am already looking forward

to 2017.

10. LHS golf qualifies three for the state tournament



Hogan Welch (left), Ty Martin (middle) and T.J. Svoboda all earned a spot in the Class 4A state golf tournament in May.

Three Louisburg High School golfers put together a strong performance in less-than-ideal weather conditions during the Class 4A regional tournament in May.

Hogan Welch, T.J. Svoboda and Ty Martin all three earned qualifying scores to earn a spot in the Class 4A state tournament in the rain at Dub's Dread Golf Course. At the state tournament, Welch led the way as he shot an 84 to finish 34th overall in his second consecutive state tournament.

9. Tappan, Conklin win state debate crown



Carson Tappan (left) and Curran Conklin (right) pose for a picture with their state championship debate trophy with coach Brian Weilert.

After 11 rounds and 17 hours of debate over two days, Carson Tappan and Curran Conklin didn't have a lot more left to give.

But all that hard work paid off for the Louisburg High School duo.

During the Class 4A 2-speaker state debate tournament at Independence High School, Tappan and Conklin were awarded their first state championship after finishing with an 11-0 record.

They weren't the only Louisburg team to come home with some hardware.

Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson found

themselves among the final four teams as well. Despite a close split-decision loss in the semifinals, Holtzen and Anderson finished third to win their first state trophy.

8. Three Wildcats win regional track titles, qualify 11 events for state



Chloe Renner (left), T.J. Dover (middle) and Isabelle Holtzen won regional titles in their respective events in May at the regional meet in Chanute.

Louisburg High School students Isabelle Holtzen, Chloe Renner and T.J. Dover were among several members of the Wildcat track teams to have big performances at the Class 4A regional meet in May at Chanute High School.

Holtzen won a regional crown in the pole vault, while Renner won the triple jump to lead the Lady Cats as they qualified for six events total. Louisburg sent all three relay teams that consisted of Kaitlyn Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Megan Lemke, Reilly Alexander, Jordon Leach, Hanna Becker, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham, Liz Hildreth and Holtzen. Sophie McMullen also earned a spot in the discus.

Dover captured a regional crown in the discus as he recorded a personal best throw of more than 150 feet. He was one of five

events to go to the state meet. Teammate Jarod Woodward also qualified in the shot put, while Chris Williams did the same in the 400 dash.

Brandon Cooper, Quinn Rigney, Ben Minster, along with Williams, helped the 4×100 relay team earn a spot, while Wyatt Reece, Ben Hupp, Tanner Belcher and Michael Minster also qualified in the 4×800 relay.

7. FFA wins three state titles, shines at national competition



Members of the LHS FFA chapter won three state titles in May and later traveled to nationals in October and brought home several honors.

After three Louisburg High School FFA teams won state titles in their respective career development events in May at the state competition, those same students performed well at the nationals.

Louisburg sent three teams to the 89th Annual National FFA

Convention in Indianapolis and all three were among the top in their respective Career Development Events (CDE). Each team received a gold emblem, while 11 of the 12 members who attended received individual gold emblems as well.

Paige Buffington, Wyatt Reece, Georgia Wilde, Justin Sievert, Hattie Harris, Hallie Hutsell, Faith Seufferling, Mariah Wrigley, Madelynn Yalowitz, Bryn O'Meara, Morgan Strumillo and Lexie Reece all came away with honors from nationals.

6. Cross country sends three to state, Moore captures medal



Freshman Trinity Moore became the first female runner in Louisburg history to capture a state cross country medal.

Louisburg High School freshman Trinity Moore didn't look like a first-year varsity runner at the Class 4A state cross country meet as she finished 19th overall with a time of 20 minutes and 54 seconds – just 10 seconds off her personal best time. That finish was good enough to earn a state medal and became the first female runner in Louisburg history to do so.

Moore joined juniors Wyatt Reece and Tim Smith as all three runners competed in the state meet in Wamego in October. Reece and Smith finished 48th and 68th, respectively, just a week after finishing in the top five at the regional meet.

5. Koechner, Keegan earn medals as Wildcat wrestling puts five to state



Louisburg's Mason Koechner was one of two medalists for the Wildcats at the Class 4A state wrestling tournament in February. Koechner finished third at 220 pounds and teammate Nathan Keegan was sixth at 120 pounds.

For the first time since 2011, a member of the Louisburg High School wrestling team left the Class 4A state tournament with a medal – in fact – two of them did.

Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan finished in the top six of their respective weight classes at state meet in Salina. Koechner took third overall at 220 pounds, while Keegan came in sixth at 120 pounds.

Along with the two state medalists, the Wildcats also sent three other wrestlers to state. Anders Vance (285 pounds), Thad Hendrix (113) and Hunter Bindi (106) competed for

Louisburg as it qualified five for state for the second consecutive season.

4. Griffin signs with New Orleans Saints



Photo courtesy of the New Orleans Saints
Louisburg native, and Air Force Academy graduate, Garrett Griffin, was signed to the New Orleans Saints practice squad

in August.

In early June, Garrett Griffin received his diploma from the Air Force Academy and shook hands with the President of the United States.

That event alone is enough to top most people's list of accomplishments. Four days later, Griffin fulfilled a life-long dream.

Following his graduation from the Air Force, Griffin was signed by the New Orleans Saints and his dream of playing professional football became a reality. The Louisburg native competed in the Saints training camp and later earned a spot on the team's practice squad, where he currently resides.

3. Wildcat football rallies around coach, ends playoff drought



The Louisburg High School football team celebrates its

regional championship and its first playoff win in four years.

The season didn't get off to the start members of the Louisburg High School football team were hoping for. The Wildcats dealt with the departure of head coach Kyle Littrell before the season, but instead of letting it define their season, it made them stronger.

Louisburg rallied behind its former coach and the Wildcats won their first playoff game in four years after they defeated Independence in November to win a regional title. The Wildcats lost to eventual state champion Bishop Miege in the sectional round of the playoffs and ended their season with an 8-3 record.

2. Girls soccer team wins regional crown during inaugural season



The Louisburg girls soccer team celebrates its regional championship in the Wildcats' inaugural season.

As the final buzzer sounded, members of the Louisburg girls soccer team rushed to each other in the middle of the field at the Wildcat Sports Complex. It was a sense of euphoria.

The Wildcats had every reason to be excited.

Louisburg – a program that has been in existence for all of two months – won its first regional title in program history in May after it ousted Basehor-Linwood in a 3-1 victory during the regional championship game. The win put the Wildcats in the state quarterfinals, where their season came to an end with 3-1 loss to De Soto and finished up with a 14-4-1 record on season.

1. Boys soccer advances to state final four



The Louisburg High School boys soccer team made history this past season as the Wildcats earned their first state quarterfinal victory and a spot in the Class 4A final four.

The state quarterfinal round had been nothing but heartbreak for the Louisburg High School boys soccer team.

In their previous six appearances, the Wildcats have seen their season come to an end and those players were left only to dream what playing in the state final four would be like.

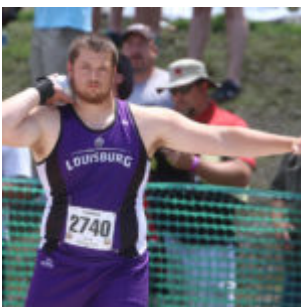
There was no imagining this time around.

Louisburg got a goal in the 75th minute from senior Herman Knipp to give the Wildcats a 1-0 victory over Trinity Academy

in the state quarterfinals in Louisburg. The Wildcats moved on to the Class 4A state final four in Topeka in November, where they took fourth – the best finish in program history.

The Wildcats (14-6-2) finished their season with losses to eventual state champion Bishop Miege and Andover Central, but doubled their number of wins from the prior year.

Woodward joins Fort Hays track program



Louisburg High School graduate Jarod Woodward is getting ready to take the next step in his track career as he signed on with the Fort Hays State track and field program to throw the shot put. Woodward is a two-time state qualifier for Louisburg and had a personal best throw of 53 feet this season.

Jarod Woodward's track future changed for the better during Louisburg High School's home invitational back in late April.

It was there when Woodward let loose for a personal best throw of 53 feet in the shot put, which was one of the top marks at the time in Class 4A. Not only did it win him the competition, but the throw caught the notice of some college coaches.

About a month later, Woodward was signing with an NCAA Division II program. The 2016 LHS graduate committed to throw for the Fort Hays State track and field team next season.

“I am just beyond excited,” Woodward said. “I think it is just a great opportunity for me. Fort Hays is a great fit and has a great agricultural program, which is what I want to do, so it is just the best fit all the way around.”

Woodward, a two-time state qualifier in the shot put, was familiar with the Fort Hays track program as he watched his cousin compete for the Tigers in a meet last year. He had the chance to get to know some of the coaches and what their track program was all about.

When the Fort Hays State staff saw Woodward’s mark, they reached out to him following the regional meet in May and offered him a scholarship then.

“When I was around the program back then I could tell it was the perfect fit for me,” Woodward said. “The coaches were great and I know my cousin was enjoying his time there. Plus Fort Hays is a small school so it was a perfect fit to me and that is what I was looking for.”

Track in college wasn’t always a sure thing for Woodward and that wasn’t his main focus. His priority was to get ready for college and his major of animal science.

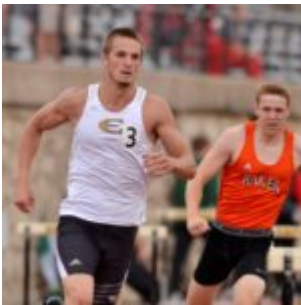
“Really, I always wanted to go to Kansas State and be the first in my family to go to college,” he said. “That was the dream for me, but Fort Hays is a great school as well and it really worked out for the best.”

School and track won’t be the only thing on his schedule once he reports to Hays. The rodeo coaches at the college have also approached Woodward about joining the rodeo team.

“It has been awhile since I have done rodeo, but I am looking

forward to getting back in it again,” he said. “With my body build, they thought I could do steer wrestling so I think that can be fun. I report on Aug. 15 and it really can’t get here soon enough. I am just ready to get down there and get started.”

Sander shines on track, in classroom for Emporia State



Emporia State sophomore, and Louisburg High School graduate, Wyatt Sander had a successful track season for the Hornets as he earned All-American status for the 4×400-meter relay in both the indoor and outdoor seasons.

EMPORIA – Wyatt Sander joined the Emporia State track and field team two years ago wondering where his place was going to be on the Hornet roster.

Sander seems to have found the right fit. The Emporia State sophomore is now an indoor and outdoor All-American.

The 2014 Louisburg High School graduate was a member of the Hornet 4×400-meter relay team that finished fifth at the NCAA Outdoor Championships in Florida in late May. Sander, who runs the third leg of the relay, helped the team to a time of 3

minutes and 9.53 seconds.

Earlier in May, Sander, along with teammates Duke Tibbs, Parker Evans and Taysean Goodwin, won the 4×400 relay at the MIAA Championships.

It turned out to be the perfect ending for what has been a long season.

“To get down to Florida and be back at the national meet was a great experience all around,” Sander said. “We went to the meet hoping to finish in the top eight because that meant we would become All-Americans again. I knew we could do it too because during the whole outdoor season we never ran to our full potential it felt like. We finished second overall in the collegiate division at Drake Relays so that gave us a big confidence boost before our conference meet and before nationals.

“To earn the All-American status is one of the best feelings I’ve had in my athletic career. All of us on the relay team went a little crazy on the infield when we saw that we made it in the finals for the 4×4 outdoor. Probably the only feeling better would be to become a national champion.”

Sander also helped the Hornets throughout the season in the hurdles as he finished fourth and sixth, respectively, in the 400- and 110-meter hurdles at the MIAA Championships.

Still, it has been the 4×400 relay where Sander has thrived and it all started during his indoor season. Sander, along with Evans, Goodwin and Luke Stenzel, shattered the 32-year-old MIAA indoor record by three seconds in 3:13.71.

The team also broke the Emporia State school record by four seconds and went on to finish sixth in the nation in the NCAA Indoor Championships to earn All-American status there as well.

Sander was also a part of Emporia's distance medley relay team that took third at the MIAA Championships. He also finished sixth in the conference in the high hurdles during the indoor season.

"Indoor really set the tone for me, I believe, for the rest of the season and maybe even for the rest of my career at ESU," Sander said. "When we won the indoor title it was a great feeling because not only did we beat the meet record, we were able to clinch our spot at the indoor nationals and get a conference title."

As well as Sander has performed on the track, he has fared even better in the classroom and the school rewarded him for it. In early May, Sander was awarded the school's Undergraduate Award of Excellence.



Wyatt Sander (second, from left) receives the Undergraduate Award of Excellence from Emporia State in early May.

The award is given to an outstanding male and female underclass student athlete who excels in athletics and academics. Sander has a 3.94 grade point average and is a member of the Emporia State Athletic Director's Honor Roll,

the MIAA Academic Honor Roll and is an MIAA Scholar-Athlete.

“Generally all the awards given at the athletics banquet go to the seniors with the occasional junior in the mix so I figured the undergraduate award was going to go to a junior, someone who has had more time at ESU to establish themselves,” Sander said. “When I heard my name called it was a complete shock. Walking up to the front of the big ballroom we were in, my heart was racing due to excitement and some nerves. It was definitely an honor to receive that award. I hope I can maybe get it again next year, but just to receive it once is awesome.”

Life as a college athlete is never easy as students are constantly trying to divide their time between academics and athletics, which makes the award an even bigger accomplishment for Sander.

“Things do get very stressful with balancing school work and athletics,” Sander said. “You really have to buckle down and have your priorities straight. If you don’t have your school work at the top of your list, followed by your athletics, and you let other extracurricular activities take priority then you will see a major decline in your academics as well as your performance athletically.

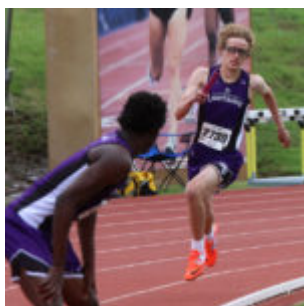
“People generally worry that playing college sports takes up all your time, which don’t get me wrong it takes up a lot of time, but if you manage your time wisely and find what works best for you it becomes much easier to balance your academics, your athletics and your social life.”

As good of a year as Sander had, he is looking toward bigger and better things next season with the Hornets.

“Some great things happened this last year for me athletically, so my goals are to just improve upon those accomplishments,” Sander said. “If for some reason I can’t improve then I at least want to repeat the accomplishments, I

don't want to do any worse. My goals are to be conference champions and All-Americans in the 4x4 for both indoor and outdoor seasons, but I also want to improve individually in my hurdle races. I am really looking forward to it."

Louisburg track gains experience at state



Louisburg freshman Chris Williams rounds the curve in the 4x100-meter relay as he prepares to handoff to teammate Brandon Cooper on Friday at the Kansas State Track and Field Championships in Wichita.

WICHITA – The Louisburg High School track team traveled to Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championships on Friday and it was on a momentum high.

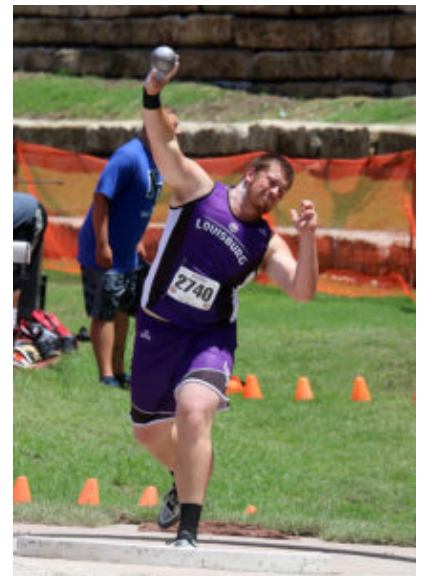
Louisburg captured three regional titles the previous week and qualified for state in 11 events. The momentum died down a little bit Saturday as the Wildcats left Wichita State University without a state medal when the two-day meet concluded.

Even though they didn't leave with any hardware, the Wildcats gained valuable experience as many of those who attended were

either freshmen or sophomores.

That was especially true on the boys side as freshman Chris Williams nearly found himself on the medal stand. Williams finished ninth in the 400-meter dash with a time of 51.48 seconds and just missed out on the finals.

The top eight in each event earn a state medal.



Louisburg senior Jarod Woodward launches the shot put Saturday at the state meet in Wichita.

“I thought we competed pretty well,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “We were within range of our personal record in most events. We didn’t place that well, but we took a lot of younger kids that I hope will get there again and perform better.”

Senior Jarod Woodward found himself in a loaded shot put competition that saw seven competitors throw for more than 50 feet, including state champion Ian Rudzik (Ulysses) who threw 62 feet, 7 inches. Woodward recorded a toss of 48 feet to

come in 10th overall.

Junior T.J. Dover tried to build off his personal best throw in the discus from the regional meet, but came up just short with a throw of 138-3 and came in 11th.

Louisburg also had a pair of relays who ran strong times. The 4×800-meter relay of Wyatt Reece, Tanner Belcher, Ben Hupp and Michael Minster came in 14th in 8 minutes and 47 seconds.

The 4×100-meter relay team of Ben Minster, Quinn Rigney, Williams and Brandon Cooper tied a personal best in 45.1 seconds and came in 15th.

On the girls side, sophomore Isabelle Holtzen was one spot away from earning her state medal. In the pole vault Saturday, Holtzen came in ninth after she cleared 9 feet.

Kaitlyn Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Reilly Alexander and Megan Lemke ran just off their personal best in the 4×400-meter relay and took 15th in 4:19, while Lemke, Gaza, Jordon Leach and Hanna Becker came in 16th in the 4×100 relay in 53.1 seconds.



Senior Megan Lemke sprints to the finish in

**the final leg of the
4×400-meter relay Friday
at Wichita State
University.**

Liz Hildreth, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham and Holtzen took 16th in the 4×800 relay in 10:55 to round out the track events Saturday.

“Overall we came into the state meet with some of the slower times,” Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said. “I will say I was pleased on the track. All the relay teams ran some of their best times, or close to their personal record. We are young and I think next year we have a chance to head back to state and earn some medals.”

In the field events, junior Chloe Renner recorded a mark of 31-8.25 in the triple jump to come in 15th. Sophomore Sophie McMullen was also 15th in the discus with a toss of 99-10.