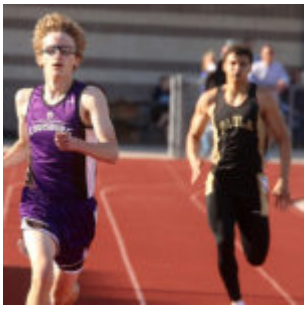
Wildcat track hopes for big season



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).



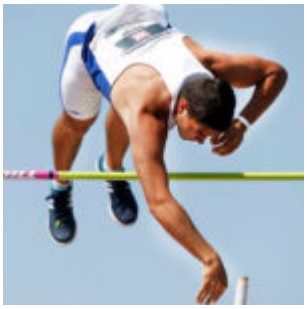
Gary Griffin has spent the last 18 years as the Louisburg High School boys track and field coach.

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 Seuferling, 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 Grffin, 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.

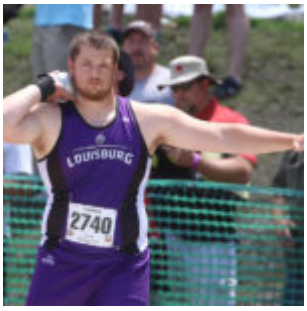
There was no imagining this time around.

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 4×4 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 4×100-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

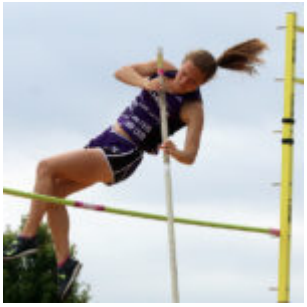
the final leg of the 4×400-meter relay Friday at Wichita State University.

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.

Holtzen, Renner win regional crowns to lead Lady Cats



Louisburg sophomore Isabelle Holtzen clears a mark in the pole vault during the Class 4A regional track meet Friday at Chanute High School. Holtzen won the event after she cleared 9

feet, 6 inches. In all, the Lady Cats qualified in six events for this week’s state meet.

CHANUTE – Isabelle Holtzen and Chloe Renner couldn’t believe their eyes.

In two separate events at the Class 4A regional track meet, going at the same time just feet apart, the unthinkable was happening for both Louisburg athletes.

They were about to become regional champions.

Holtzen watched as one of the state’s top pole vaulters failed to make a height, while Renner took off in the triple jump and recorded the best mark of her life – by far.

Both of those developments gave them a regional title and got the day started right for the Louisburg girls track and field team in Chanute.

Along with Holtzen and Renner, the Lady Cats qualified for state in six events. Louisburg will send all three relays to this weekend’s state meet at Wichita State University, while sophomore Sophie McMullen also qualified in the discus.

The top four in each event earn a spot at the state competition.



Junior Chloe Renner lands in the sand pit following an attempt in the triple jump Friday in Chanute.

As a team, the Lady Cats finished fifth overall with 40 points and Paola won the regional team crown with 144 points. Chanute was second with 92.

Holtzen, a sophomore, became the first to punch her ticket to state as she cleared 9 feet, 6 inches in the pole vault – which tied a personal best. Holtzen and Paola's Samantha Van Hoecke were left at 10 feet.

Although Holtzen went out at 10, Van Hoecke didn't enter the competition until 10 feet and was unable to clear the mark.

"I was not expecting her to get out and it really surprised me," Holtzen said. "I really feel bad for her. We are friends and we have been to a lot of meets together so I have gotten to know her. When she got out it really hurt me too.

"At the same time I was really excited that I won, but I really wanted to get 10 feet. That is ok though because I know I still did well so I was pretty happy with that."

Just across the way at the triple jump, Renner got the mark she has always been looking for. Renner, a junior, recorded a jump of 33-9.5 to win the event by three inches.

Renner’s mark was a personal best by more than a foot and she will make her first ever state appearance. She nearly qualified in the long jump as well, but finished fifth at 15-10.5, losing a state spot by two inches.

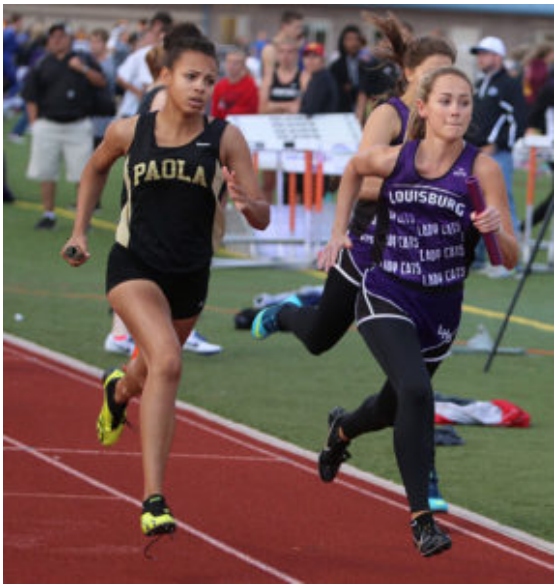
“I did a lot better than I expected to do, that is for sure,” Renner said. “My expectations weren’t that high this year and I was so thrilled to finally get a compliment from (jump coach Kyle) Littrell.

“I am excited to go. It will be good to focus just in the triple jump all week in practice, so I hope to go even further and Littrell said I could have a good shot at medaling at state.”

McMullen continued the good run for the Lady Cats she recorded her best throw of the season in the discus. The Louisburg sophomore had a toss of 105-8 to take fourth.

“It is nerve-racking but at the same time I am really excited to go to state,” McMullen said. “Last year I didn’t spin at all, and this year I am really working on my spin so I can hopefully get a better mark at state.

“I just want to go and see what happens. Just like this time, this is my first regional meet and I just wanted to come out and compete.”



Louisburg sophomore Reilly Alexander runs stride for stride with a Paola runner during a leg of the 4×400 relay Friday in Chanute.

The Lady Cats continued their success on track as all three relay teams qualified and each came in fourth overall.

Two of those races provided a lot of drama as the 4×100- and 4×400-meter relays held off competitors at the end to earn that state berth.

The 4×400 team of Kaitlyn Gaza, Mikayla Quinn, Reilly Alexander and Megan Lemke recorded a time of 4 minutes and 18 seconds to shave five seconds off their previous best time.

“I think the last meet we came out and coach (Greg Darrington) told us to come out and run a 4:18 and we all looked at him like he was crazy,” Gaza said. “I knew that when I handed off to Mikayla that I kept us in a good spot.”

Quinn and Alexander kept Louisburg in the top four before Lemke took the baton on the anchor leg. Lemke actually came out fast and took the lead for a few seconds before the other three teams – Girard, Paola and Anderson County – were able to make up ground.

“Even my mom came up to me and asked why I ran so fast and then lost it,” Lemke joked. “I just wanted to beat Paola because they beat us in everything. I started out really fast because I had a lot of adrenaline going, but I kind of died at the end but it was worth it because we got a PR (personal record).”

The 4×100 team of Gaza, Lemke, Jordon Leach and Hanna Becker also ran a good time of 52.59 to take fourth.

It was Gaza’s sprint in the anchor leg that sealed it for the Lady Cats as she passed two teams in the final 100 meters to edge Spring Hill at the finish line.

“When I got the baton, we were either in fifth or sixth, so I knew that I really had to step it up and I just started going,” Gaza said. “I knew that I was running for more than myself. I was running for three other people as well. I passed the Spring Hill girl on my right and I knew that we had it and was such a good feeling.”

Leach, a freshman, has provided the Lady Cats with a little extra boost as she joined the team a few weeks ago.

“Jordon jumped in as a freshman and has taken to it really well,” Lemke said. “She was a little timid at first but she is really talented and really improved our times.”

It was less of a dramatic finish for the 4×800 team of Holtzen, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham and Liz Hildreth as they knew they had already qualified before the race began. Since only four teams entered, the Lady Cat team was assured a berth barring a disqualification.



Megan Lemke (left) takes a handoff from teammate Jordon Leach during the 4×100 relay Friday at the Class 4A regional meet in Chanute.

That fact didn’t make it any less exciting for the four runners.

“It is awesome,” Hildreth said. “I have gone to state the last couple of years and watched and that track is just a dream with those grandstands there. I can’t believe I get to run there.

Lauren Becker concurred with her teammate.

“This is the first time going to state in anything besides choir so it makes me feel like we accomplished something,” Lauren said. “We have been practicing since Feb. 29 and it is a great feeling to know that it has paid off.”

Preliminaries for some events will begin Friday morning at Wichita State’s Cessna Stadium and the meet will finish up on Saturday.

Other Wildcat results are:

100 dash: Jordon Leach, 7th, 14.17

200 dash: Kaitlyn Gaza, 10th, 28.21

400 dash: Mikayla Quinn, 5th, 1:04.36

800 run: Liz Hildreth, 8th, 2:39

100 hurdles: Klara Riester, 7th, 18.63

300 hurdles: Riester, 7th, 51.79

Dover wins regional title, Wildcats qualify five



Louisburg junior T.J. Dover lets the discus fly during the Class 4A regional track meet Friday at Chanute High School. Dover won a regional title in the discus with a throw of 150 feet, 2 inches and the Wildcats qualified for state in five events overall.

CHANUTE – Before this season, T.J. Dover had never given track much thought.

Then this year he decided to give it a try as a way to stay active for football. Needless to say that choice has worked

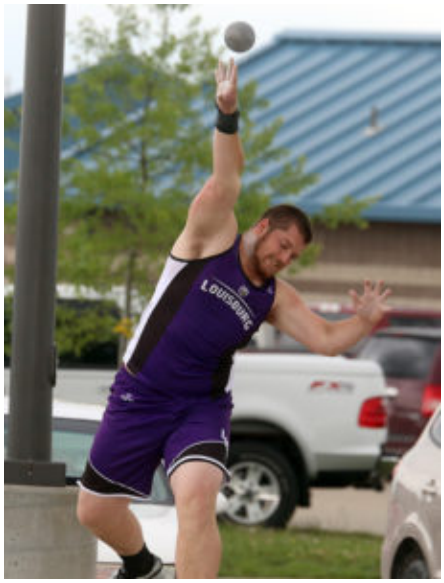
out beautifully for the Louisburg junior.

During the Class 4A regional meet in Chanute on Friday, Dover punched his ticket to the state meet as he set a personal record in the discus. Dover recorded a mark of 150 feet, 2 inches and was crowned regional champion.

This was the only time Dover had won the discus competition all season.

“I have been trying to hit 150 for a few weeks now ever since I hit 143 at Gardner and it felt good to finally hit it and win something,” Dover said. “I am happy going into to state and I am excited to see what I can do there.”

Along with Dover’s mark in the discus, Louisburg qualified for state in five events overall as the top four places at regionals will make the trip to the state meet Friday and Saturday at Wichita State University.



Senior Jarod Woodward lifts the shot put into the air during Friday’s regional track meet in Chanute.

“TJ has worked really hard this year and to get a throw off like that at the biggest meet of the year, was awesome,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “Hopefully he can improve on that this weekend and get a medal.”

Senior Jarod Woodward (shot put), freshman Chris Williams (400-meter dash) and the 4×100- and 4×800-meter relays teams will also compete at the state meet for a chance to get a medal.

As a team, the Wildcats finished fifth overall with 42 points and Paola won the regional team title with 116.33 points. Spring Hill was second with 90.

Woodward will make his second straight trip to state after he came in third in the shot put with a toss of 49-3 and hopes to leave state meet with a medal this time around. Woodward has a season-best throw of 53 feet, which would put him in the top five in Class 4A.

“I didn’t perform to the best of my ability,” Woodward said. “In the past meets, I have been progressively increasing, but this week I was trying to change up my technique. Even though I didn’t throw as far as I can, I am going to come back and attack it as best I can.

“I just wanted to make sure I got in the top four and that was the most important thing. Last year at state there was a lot of people there so I had some butterflies, but this year hopefully I can get past that and do some big things out there.”



Louisburg's Quinn Rigney takes a handoff from teammate Ben Minster during the 4×100 relay Friday.

On the track, Williams continues to shave off time in the 400-meter dash and it continued Friday as he finished runner-up with a personal-best 50.67 seconds.

In all the 4A regional meets combined, Williams has the third-fastest time and he hopes to leave Wichita with a state medal.

"Chris is a gutsy, competitive kid who has kind of exceeded my expectations, but he is peaking right now," Griffin said. "That time will get him in the finals if he can run that again, and I think he can."

Williams will compete in two events out at state as he helped the 4×100-meter relay of Brandon Cooper, Ben Minster and Quinn Rigney to a third-place finish in 45.09 seconds, which was a personal best.

"I am pretty happy to go to state in the 400," Williams said. "I really wanted to go with the 4×400, but to go in the 4×100 and 400 is pretty good."



Ben Hupp hands the baton off to Michael Minster for the final leg of the 4×800 relay.

The Louisburg 4×800 team of Wyatt Reece, Ben Hupp, Michael Minster and Tanner Belcher didn't have to sweat out if they were going to be a state qualifier. Only four schools entered a 4×800 team so the Wildcats knew they were in before the race, but that didn't stop them from running well.

Louisburg finished in 8 minutes and 48 seconds to take third overall, but to earn a state medal both relay teams will have to take even more time off.

"The 4×800 crew has worked hard all year, and they are capable of cutting quite a bit of time off so hopefully they can run well," Griffin said. "We had pretty good handoffs in the 4×100 and that is the key to that race. We will need to do the same this weekend and hopefully aim for the mid 44's to have a chance to make the finals."

Other Wildcat results are:

100 dash: Brandon Cooper, 6th, 11.64

400 dash: Blue Caplinger, 13th, 55.72

1,600 run: Wyatt Reece, 6th, 4:58

3,200 run: Devyn Small, 11th, 11:39; Tim Smith, 12th, 12:01

110 hurdles: Jonathan Ventre, 11th, 17.67

300 hurdles: Ventre, 13th, 46.27

4×400 relay: 5th, 3:37

Triple jump: Cooper, 7th, 39-0.50

Shot put: T.J. Dover, 5th, 45-3

Louisburg track captures league medals



Louisburg senior Jarod Woodward rears back for an attempt in the shot put during a meet earlier this season. The Wildcat track teams traveled to De Soto last Thursday and left with several league medals.

DE SOTO – In a meet that was filled with state champions and medalists, the Louisburg High School track and field teams had

their work cut out Thursday during the Frontier League meet at De Soto High School.

The Wildcats hung in there as they medaled in several events, despite not having a league champion.

The Louisburg girls finished fourth in the team standings with 57.5 points. Paola and Baldwin took a chunk of the team points as Paola won the league crown with 205 points and Baldwin was second at 194.

Still, the Wildcats found several positives to build on and it started with junior Liz Hildreth in the 800-meter run. Hildreth finished second overall with a time of 2 minutes and 34 seconds and was the Wildcats' top finisher on the day.

"I was really proud of the girls," Louisburg girls coach Greg Darrington said. "They showed me some toughness competing on the track. Liz finally got out of her comfort zone and did a great job finishing second. She has a really good chance to compete this week and head to state if she can keep improving."

The league meet was just the precursor to what is an even bigger meet Friday when Louisburg travels to Chanute for regionals. The top four in each event will qualify for state.

Louisburg's relay teams all finished in top four at league. The 4×100-meter relay of Jordon Leach, Megan Lemke, Hanna Becker and Kaitlyn Gaza was fourth in 53.06 seconds

Lemke, Gaza, Mikayla Quinn and Reilly Alexander ran a 4:23 in the 4×400 relay to come in third. Isabelle Holtzen, Lauren Becker, Shaylor Whitham and Hildreth took fourth in the 4×800 in 10:45.

"The relay teams did a nice job," Darrington said. "The 4×100 improved as well as the other two, which is nice to see. They all stand a chance to head to state, but they must run their

best races of the year.”

Also on the track, Quinn ran a season-best time of 1:04 in the 400-meter dash to come in fifth. Gaza took sixth in the 200-meter dash in 28.5 seconds and Leach was seventh in the 100 dash in 13.96.

Junior Chloe Renner scored points in three different field events for Louisburg. Renner came in fourth in the long jump with a mark of 15 feet and 7.75 inches.

Renner was also fourth in the triple jump with a leap of 32 feet and fifth in the high jump after she cleared 4-7.

Kaitlyn Urban led Louisburg in the triple jump with a mark of 32-2 to take third and Lemke came in seventh in the long jump at 14-5.5.

Sophomore Sophie McMullen recorded a couple good throws in the discus, including one that went 103-2.5, which was good enough to take third. Teammate Lexie Reece also scored points in the event with a throw of 95-0.

“It was nice to see Sophie break 100 feet, but she needs to work hard this week at practice if she wants to move on to state,” Darrington said.

Holtzen competed in a tough pole vault field, but came in fourth overall after she cleared 9-2 to round out the Lady Cat point-getters.

The Louisburg boys also went up against some tough competition as the Wildcats were sixth in the team standings with 44.5 points. Paola won the boys league title with 156 points and Baldwin was second at 136.

Freshman Jonathan Ventre continues to make strides in both hurdle events and cut down on time. On Thursday, Ventre was third in the 300-meter hurdles in 42.58 seconds and came in fifth in the 110-meter high hurdles in 16.98 seconds.

“Jonathan has had a really good season,” Louisburg boys coach Gary Griffin said. “He has improved with pretty much every meet. He is a hard worker and it is paying off.”

The Wildcats also set personal records in all three relay events.

Brandon Cooper, Chris Williams, Ben Minster and Quinn Rigney ran a time of 45.1 seconds to take fourth. Wyatt Reece, Tanner Belcher, Ben Hupp and Michael Minster helped the 4×800 to a time of 8:49 for fifth and set a personal best by nine seconds.

Ventre, Ben Minster, Michael Minster and Williams ran a 3:33 in the 4×400 to come in sixth, but shaved three seconds off their previous top time.

“They all performed pretty well, but all of them are going to have to run well if they want to qualify for state,” Griffin said.

Also on the track, Cooper ran a time of 11.68 seconds to finish fourth in the 100-meter dash. Williams came in fifth in the 400 dash in 51.77 seconds and Rigney was seventh in the 200 dash with a time of 23.99.

In the field events, senior Jarod Woodward showed he was among the best in the league in the shot put. Woodward came in third with a throw of 49-7.5.

Cooper set a personal best mark in the triple jump with a leap of 39-8.25 to come in fourth. Junior T.J. Dover was fourth in the discus with a toss of 138-3.

Freshman Ian Combs cleared 10-1 in the pole vault to come in fifth and Kristopher Light was sixth in the high jump with at 5-8.

Louisburg returns to action for the regional meet at 2 p.m. at Chanute High School.

“We did about as well as I expected there,” Griffin said. “There were a lot of state champions and state medalists at the meet and we held our own. But we are going to have to take a step up this week if we want to qualify for state. It is an exciting time and we will see who steps up.”

Other Wildcat results are:

Varsity Girls

100 dash: Hanna Becker, 14th, 14.70

200 dash: Jordon Leach, 11th, 29.41

400 dash: Kaitlyn Gaza, 8th, 1:05.75; Reilly Alexander, 10th, 1:07.54

800 dash: Lauren Becker, 10th, 2:50.42;

1,600 run: Shaylor Whitham, 10th, 6:15

3,200 run: Whitham, 11th, 14:42

100 hurdles: Klara Riester, 8th, 18:14

300 hurdles: Riester, 8th, 53.25

Long jump: Kaitlyn Urban, 13th, 13-1.5

Shot put: Morgan Strumillo, 10th, 30-3.5; Ellie Katzer, 13th, 29-1

Discus: Katzer, 9th, 90-0

Javelin: Zoie Gilliland, 9th, 88-6; Paige Buffington, 10th, 87-1

JV Girls

100 dash: Grayson Anderson, 4th, 14.99

200 dash: Julianne Finley, 3rd, 30.06; Anderson, 5th, 30.69

400 dash: Finley, 1st, 1:06.28

800 run: Alex Miller, 1st, 2:43

3,200 run: Miller, 1st, 14:00

100 hurdles: Kristen Bell, 6th, 21.05

300 hurdles: Bell, 5th, 59.90

4×100 relay: 5th, 58.49

4×400 relay: 1st, 5:06

High jump: Eileen Benne, 1st, 4-8; Makenna Allen, 4th, 4-2

Long jump: Benne, 3rd, 13-5.25; Allen, 8th, 12-3.5

Triple jump: Benne, 2nd, 29-3; Allen, 3rd, 28-2

Discus: Melia Rice, 5th, 57-3.5

Javelin: Rice, 5th, 62-0

Varsity Boys

100 dash: Ben Minster, 10th, 11.88; Quinn Rigney, 11th, 12.01

200 dash: Minster, 9th, 24.52; Brandon Cooper, 13th, 24.92

800 run: Tanner Belcher, 10th, 2:10.34; Michael Minster, 11th, 2:10.87

1,600 run: Wyatt Reece, 9th, 4:56; Tim Smith, 12th, 5:02; Devyn Small, 17th, 5:15

3,200 run: Smith, 9th, 10:50; Reece, 11th, 11:14; Small, 15th, 11:40

300 hurdles: Ben Hupp, 11th, 46.96

Triple jump: Kris Light, 9th, 36-6.5

Shot put: T.J. Dover, 8th, 45-8; Bradley Trageser, 14th, 40-2

Discus: Mason Koechner, 12th, 110-7

Javelin: Dustyn Rizzo, 11th, 120-5; Jacob Jensen, 15th, 112-11

JV Boys

100 dash: Jackson Ewalt, 3rd, 12.29; Will Ridley, 10th, 12.76; Austin Moore, 11th, 12.76

200 dash: Moore, 6th, 25.26; Ridley, 8th, 25.54; Ewalt, 9th, 25.54

400 dash: Blue Caplinger, 1st, 54.83; Scott Murphy, 4th, 56.51; Owen Staver, 8th, 58.63

800 run: Eddie Murphy, 3rd, 2:19

1,600 run: Jacob Benne, 8th, 5:30; Dylan Knipp, 16th, 6:05

3,200 run: Eddie Murphy, 6th, 12:10; Benne, 9th, 12:30; Knipp,

12th, 13:36

4×100 relay: 2nd, 47.56

4×400 relay: 1st, 3:49

High jump: Marshall Rooney, 6th, 5-4; Dalton Knipp, 7th, 5-2

Pole vault: Caplinger, 1st, 10-1

Long jump: Rooney, 4th, 17-4.25; Kyle Allen, 6th, 16-10.5; Jacob Arnett, 9th, 15-3

Triple jump: Dalton Knipp, 1st, 37-4; Allen, 2nd, 36-5.25; Rooney, 3rd, 36-0

Shot put: Matt Holloway, 3rd, 36-1.5; Nathan Allen, 5th, 34-1.5; Kiefer Tucker, 7th, 33-5

Discus: Dalton Ribordy, 3rd, 109-6; Tucker, 5th, 106-1; Holloway, 9th, 88-0

Javelin: Holloway, 4th, 112-7; Ribordy, 5th, 110-5.5; N. Allen, 8th, 104-1