

Louisburg track gears up for season



Louisburg senior Jarod Woodward is looking to make his second straight trip to the state track meet this season after qualifying in the shot put a season ago. The Wildcats open their season Tuesday at Mill Valley High School.

The Louisburg High School track and field team is going to have to replace some key pieces from last season's team that competed at the state meet.

Gone is Connor McMullen, a state champion in the discus and medalist in the javelin, along with state medalist hurdler Sean Dennis. Despite that, however, the Wildcats return several state qualifiers from a season ago.

Louisburg returns many key pieces from relays that qualified from state a season ago, along with qualifiers in the field events.

On the boys side, the Wildcats have approximately 60 out for track this year according to coach Gary Griffin, including 38 freshmen and sophomores.

Last season, Louisburg qualified all three relays for the state track meet, but did lose quite a few participants. In the 4x100 and 4x400-meter relays, sophomore Ben Minster is the

lone member from both teams to return, while senior Michael Minster, junior Ben Hupp and sophomore Wyatt Reece come back to help the 4x800 team.

Along with those four runners, Griffin hopes other runners such as Quinn Rigney and Chris Williams will be able to fill those gaps.

“Ben, Michael, Quinn, Chris and Wyatt will be the mainstays on our relays, but we are not sure about how the teams are going to look yet,” Griffin said. “It will probably be a fluid situation for the first few weeks.”

Reece will also be looked to lead the Wildcats in the distance races as he is slated to compete in the 1,600 and 3,200-meter runs, while Hupp is the team’s lone returning hurdler.

As for the sprints, Louisburg will have youth on its side as the Wildcats will count on several underclassmen. Ben Minster, Rigney and Jackson Ewalt are the most experienced runners and Griffin hopes several freshmen progress as the season goes in the field events.

In the field events, senior Jarod Woodward is the lone state qualifier to return as he hopes to build off his state appearance in the shot put. Senior Bradley Trageser, junior T.J. Dover and sophomore Garrett Lowry will give the Wildcats some depth in the shot put and discus.

Juniors Jacob Jensen and Dustyn Rizzo also hope to give the Wildcats some points in the javelin.

“I hope Jarod steps up because he needs to be the leader of the throwers,” Griffin said. “I am expecting all those other guys to score some points in the throws as well.”

The Louisburg girls team also had a good season a year ago, including state appearances in the 4x100 and 4x400 relays and the pole vault.

Coach Greg Darrington has seen a rise in numbers this season as he has 43 girls out this year and believes the Lady Cats will be able to do some good things.



Sophomore Isabelle Holtzen will try for her second straight trip to state this season in the pole vault.

“This is more girls than we have had in several years,” Darrington said “So far it has gone well in practice. I am looking forward to this year and I really feel these girls will step up and be competitive by the end of the year.”

The Lady Cats return two members from their 4x400 relay team in senior Megan Lemke and junior Kaitlyn Gaza. Sophomore Mikayla Quinn will look to fill one of those spots after having a solid year in the 400-meter dash a year ago.

They also hope to score some points in the distance races as well as Madelynn Yalowitz, Lauren Becker, Liz Hildreth and Isabelle Holtzen all return to strengthen the 4x800 relay team, along with the 800, 1,600 and 3,200-meter runs.

Louisburg's strong suit, however, might be in the jumps – specifically in the pole vault. Holtzen returns after qualifying for state a year ago in the pole vault, while teammate McKinley Mathews will also be a strong vaulter for the Lady Cats as she vies for a spot at state this year.

In the long and triple jumps, Kaitlyn Urban, Haley Earl and Chloe Renner will look to improve off last year's marks. Also, Ellie Katzer and Lexie Reece are making strides in the throws.

"I think the jumpers could be one of our strong areas this year," Darrington said. "Coach (Kyle) Littrell is doing a great job with those girls. I think in pole vault, Holtzen will push Mathews this year and both girls could qualify for state. Also Urban, Earl, and Renner have all been working really hard.

"All my throwers are young, but Ellie is looking good out of the gate. Lexie is showing signs of progress and is working very hard on her form to be able to hit some of her goals this year."

Louisburg will begin its season Tuesday when it travels to the Leavenworth Invitational, which is held at Mill Valley High School. Field events are set to begin at 3:30 p.m.

2016 LOUISBURG HIGH SCHOOL TRACK SCHEDULE

Mar. 29	at Leavenworth
Invitational	3:30 p.m.
Apr. 7	at Paola
	3:30 p.m.
Apr. 14	at Anderson
County	3:30 p.m.

Apr. 21	Louisburg
Invitational	4 p.m.
Apr. 28	at Prairie
View	3:30 p.m.
Apr. 29	at Gardner-
Edgerton	3:30 p.m.
May 6	at Wellsville Redbud
Relays	3:30 p.m.
May 12	at Frontier League
(Eudora)	3:30 p.m.
May 20	at Regionals
(TBA)	TBA

Paola AD proposes bill to help classification issue



Last October, Paola activities director Jeff Hines went to a Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) regional meeting to get updates on classification issues.

Six months later, Hines found himself in Topeka, in front of the Kansas Senate Education Committee to talk about a bill that could change the way schools are classified.

On Thursday, Hines sat in front of the committee to discuss Senate Bill 464 – a bill that he proposed with guidance of Sen. Caryn Tyson.

Statute 72-130 establishes specific guidelines pertaining to the organizational structure and functions of KSHSAA. Senate Bill 464 would change one part of the statute and strike the line which allows schools to be classified only by student enrollment.

“The total number of students in schools is a great starting point for classifying them,” Hines said. “It makes sense that the largest schools should play the largest schools and the smallest schools should play the smallest schools, but there are other things that need to be considered.”

For several months, KSHSAA has had a classification committee discuss different ways to have a competitive balance with its member schools. They came up with ideas of reducing the number of classifications or changing the number of schools in a division.

“There were no other factors being considered and that bothered me,” Hines said, “All that would do was reshuffle the schools just a little bit but we would have the same problem.”

The problem for the committee was its hands were tied thanks to the wording in Statute 72-130 that specifically states schools can only be classified by enrollment numbers and nothing else.

So Hines went to work and helped create Senate Bill 464, which does not give a specific solution to the problem, but rather would take wording out of the statute to allow KSHSAA to figure out how to classify schools on its own.

Hines gave a 15 minute testimony in front of the committee and then answered questions from the committee members for more than 30 minutes afterward. Before the hearing, Hines received

support from every member in the Frontier League, Pioneer League and all but two schools in the Kaw Valley League, as those two didn't respond before the hearing.

Following Hines' testimony, Sen. Vicki Schmidt, R-Topeka, had concerns as to why KSHSAA did not come in front of the committee itself to ask for changes.

Hines informed the committee that it would be redundant for KSHSAA to endorse the plan, because if approved, member schools would still have to vote on it. He believes Bill 464 would let KSHSAA come up with a system and let schools improve it, instead of the legislature.

"KSHSAA wants to be neutral because this proposal would affect different schools in different ways," Hines said. "It could be very beneficial to some schools and others may not like it because they might have to move up a class. So, why should KSHSAA have to pick sides in it and pit member against member? It doesn't have to be that way in my opinion."

"Yes, a school that has to move up a classification might not like it, but is it the best thing overall for the association? They can't look themselves in the mirror and say 'No, this isn't the right thing to do?'

A major problem for some member schools in KSHSAA is they do not believe it is competitively equal the way it is currently structured.

"I am not a believer in participation medals," Hines said. "If they are kindergartners, sure, but when you start playing, part of being successful later in life is learning how to compete. We all competed for a job when you have gone in for an interview and that is good. You need to have that skillset and I am not saying that we need to give more trophies out and give everyone a shot, but I just want a system in place that is equitable for all so that some don't have an unfair advantage at the expense of the rest and I think that is what

is happening."

One of the problems is the lack of balance between championships won between public and private high schools. Hines did research and presented numbers at the hearing at the number of state championships won between private and public schools from 2004 to 2014.

Here is what he found.

- Private schools make up slightly less than 8 percent of the KSHSAA membership.
- Private schools have won slightly less than 32 percent of the state championships.
- Based on membership percentage, private schools should only win approximately 8 percent of the titles, not nearly 32 percent.
- Private schools are winning four times more state titles than should be expected based on their memberships.
- Private schools are nine times more likely to win five or more state titles than their public school peers.

"In that period of time, I looked for who has won five or more state titles," Hines said. "That is a difficult feat. You look at Paola's history and we have won like seven and Louisburg has won three in 100-plus years. During those 10 years, 37 percent of those private schools won five or more during that time and public schools had 4 percent win five or more. Private schools are nine times more likely to become a dynasty or a successful program with strong tradition. You tell me how we are all the same?"

Another problem they are facing is schools with a high percentage of low socioeconomic status (SCS) students, cannot compete against fellow schools in their own classification in many activities, including football.

"There is a whole bunch of schools in the Kansas City, Kansas school district that are 6A or 5A that have no business

competing against those really hard schools," Hines said. "They don't have resources, they don't have the students, there is no interest and they have all those things working against them and I feel bad for those kids. Who wants to trot out against some of those bigger schools and know you are going to get your ears boxed in? That is not fun. Moreover, it is not challenging for the kids those schools are playing against."

Hines believes competition is important when it comes to the growth of the student athlete and it is beneficial for the school and its community.

"Not only what it does for grades, but for what it does for the human spirit," Hines said.

"When I was the FFA advisor in Paola, we won 10 state championships in nine years and you could tell the interest by the students and the community went through the roof. You can say the same thing about Louisburg and what Jim Morgan does with his FFA kids. People flock to success.

"Naturally, when they are there they feel better about themselves, they want to work harder in the classroom to stay eligible and kids that want to stay involved are going to be more successful in life. It is all about having the chance to be successful."

During Hines' testimony in front of the Senate Education Committee, not all of the legislatures seemed open to the idea. Molly Baumgardner, R-Louisburg, asked Hines if he would be willing to relinquish state funding if the legislature agrees to release oversight of how KSHSAA classifies schools.

"If we relinquished the funding behind it, (high school activities) would disappear," Hines said at the hearing.

No action was taken following the hearing, but the committee chairman spent 15 minutes with him and Tyson to help them strategize on what to do next.

One option is to amend the bill to include more specifics that could include a multiplier or a separate division for private schools and a low SCS school de-multiplier.

Another option, Hines said, would be to have the classification committee draft a letter to the Senate Education Committee that states they would like to study these other factors as part of a proposal for revamping the classification system, but not until they feel the legislature is open to changing the law.

Whatever decision comes next, however, Hines wants it to be decided by multiple people within KSHSAA on how to proceed.

"I don't feel comfortable making that change because I feel a committee needs to do the work," Hines said. "I shouldn't be doing it, nor should 11 legislators, you need more. We should let the classification committee work on it and hopefully we can get some things accomplished.

"The only way to allow this to happen is to remove the barrier in place that exists due to the state statute."

Top 10 stories of 2015



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 2015 and I am already looking forward to 2016.



Hogan Welch (left) and Wyatt Reece each qualified for state in their respective sports.

10. Welch and Reece qualify for state

LHS students Hogan Welch and Wyatt Reece each put together strong seasons in their respective sports.

In May, Welch qualified for the Class 4A state golf tournament after he shot an 85 at the Osawatomie Golf Course to become one of five individual qualifiers for state. It was the first time Welch had qualified for the state tournament and would shoot a 79 a week later in McPherson to finish 40th overall.

As for Reece, he qualified for the state cross country meet for the first time in his career in October. The Louisburg sophomore came in 13th overall and was also one of five individual qualifiers. A week later Reece traveled to Wamego to compete at the state meet and ran a 18:43 to come in 71st.



Louisburg's Jimmy Dolan (left) and Mya Diacono each suffered major head injuries from an accident just days apart. The Louisburg community rallied together to help the two families.

9. Accidents bring Louisburg community together

Jimmy Dolan and Mya Diacono live in the same community but were worlds apart from each other.

Jimmy, a junior at Louisburg High School, loves to wrestle, hang out with friends and live the life of a teenager.

It was a far cry from 9-year-old Mya who loves soccer, horses and spending time with her fourth-grade friends at Broadmoor Elementary. In a town of less than 5,000 people, the two had never met.

Two tragic accidents changed all of that.

On Jan. 12, Jimmy lost control of his vehicle while driving to school and suffered a major brain injury. Just 42 days later,

Mya was involved in an automobile accident just outside the Louisburg city limits that left her with the same severe brain trauma.

That was when the Louisburg community came together to help the two families cope with a burden no family should have to bear. Since then, both Jimmy and Mya are on the road to recovery thanks to the help of a lot of people.



Louisburg Soccer Club president Karin Olson (second from left), Louisburg HIgh School junior Maddie McDaniel (middle) and fundraising organizer DIana Moore (right) receive the WIN for KC Sprint Teamwork Award on Feb. 13 in Kansas City, Mo.

8. Girls soccer raises funds to start program, wins award

A fundraising committee made a big push to make sure there was a girls soccer program at Louisburg High School.

The committee raised \$39,000 in almost a year's time to fund the program for three years. Thanks to all the hard work, the group was also recognized by the WIN for KC organization. The

Lady Cats' soccer season will kickoff in late March.



Louisburg graduates Kody Cook (left) and Garrett Griffin are each winding down their careers with their respective Division I football programs.

7. Griffin, Cook wrap up college careers

Louisburg High School graduates Kody Cook and Garrett Griffin have lived the lives a lot of football fans could only hope for.

Both are wrapping up their Division I collegiate football careers and are doing it with a lot of success. Cook is living his dream with the Kansas State football team as he has made contributions at both the wide receiver and quarterback positions to help the Wildcats to the Liberty Bowl.

Griffin, on the other hand, battled through an injury-plagued senior season to help Air Force reach the Armed Forces Bowl and made several big plays at the tight end spot.



Louisburg quarterback Austin Terry was one of several players responsible for the Wildcats' turnaround this season.

6. Wildcat football has big turnaround

After finishing with just three wins a year ago, the Louisburg High School football team put together a strong season in 2015 as they finished with seven wins.

Those seven victories put the Wildcats within a game of Paola for the Frontier League title and Louisburg also earned a spot in the regional playoffs before falling to Basehor-Linwood in a tight contest.



The Louisburg High School soccer team captured its first regional crown since 2010 after a 2-0 win over Coffeyville.

5. Louisburg soccer wins regional crown

Through much of the regular season, the Louisburg High School soccer team didn't have much to cheer about.

The Wildcats had just four wins during the regular season, but they seemed to find the right chemistry in the postseason. Louisburg rattled off three consecutive wins in the postseason, including a 2-0 victory over Coffeyville-Field Kindley in the regional championship.

It was the Wildcats' first regional title since 2010 and their sixth in the last 10 years.



Anders Vance won a regional title in the 285-pound weight class last February as he was one of five Wildcats to earn state bids.

4. Louisburg wrestling qualifies five for state

The Louisburg wrestling team hadn't been a part of the state tournament since 2012 – that is before last season.

The Wildcats put together a breakout season as they qualified five for the state tournament, while Anders Vance won the regional crown at 285 pounds. Brenton Wrigley (195 pounds), Mason Koechner (220), Nathan Keegan (113) and Ryan Adams (138) all made the trip to Salina for the Class 4A state tourney.



Jeff Lohse (left) and Ben York each stepped away from their head coaching posts in 2015.

3. Long-time coaches resign from post

Jeff Lohse and Ben York had been fixtures in their respective sports for Louisburg High School, but both decided to call it quits this year.

Lohse, who spent the last 17 years as the head coach for the LHS baseball team, stepped down from his spot in May, citing personal reasons. Lohse led the Wildcats to two state tournament appearances.

York, who was the head coach when the boys soccer program started, also cited personal reasons for leaving the Wildcat soccer program after 13 years. York helped the Wildcats to six regional titles in the last 10 years.



Connor McMullen won the state title in the discus back in May and became Louisburg's first track state champion since 2011.

2. McMullen wins state title in discus, Dennis medals in hurdles

Louisburg High School senior Connor McMullen finally got the state title in the discus he had been searching for.

McMullen recorded a throw of 173 feet, 1 inch on his final attempt to win the Class 4A state discus title in Wichita back in May. He would also medal eighth in the javelin with a toss of 164-02.

Fellow senior Sean Dennis also garnered a state medal as he took fourth in the 110-meter hurdles. The boys and girls team combined sent a total of 11 athletes to the state meet.



The Louisburg High School volleyball team finished third overall in 2015 after making it to state for the fifth time in the last six seasons.

1. Lady Cat volleyball takes third at state

The Louisburg High School volleyball team has made a habit of making the trip to Salina in recent years and this season was no exception.

This time, however, the Lady Cats finished with a victory.

After ending their season with a runner-up performance and two fourth-place finishes at state the last three years, Louisburg won its final match of the season in 2015 as it defeated Tonganoxie in the third-place match.

The Lady Cats qualified for the state tournament for the fifth time in the last six years.

Opinion: Rough patch leads to new beginning



I am just going to come right out and say it, "I'm scared."

Yeah, it is an unusual way to start out an opinion piece, but there is no two ways around it – I am petrified. But believe it or not, it is what keeps me going.

We have all had at least one point in our existence where our lives changed for better or worse. I have had more than a few of those in my life, but the latest one came on Jan. 9.

It started out like all the other Fridays over the last seven years. I reported to work, spent a few hours in the office getting ready for what was a busy weekend of prep coverage ahead. It was the first action after Christmas break and I was ready to get back into the swing of things.

That never took place.

My bosses came into my office early that afternoon to inform me I was being let go. The job of covering Louisburg athletics was no longer mine. I packed up my things, turned in my key, went home, punched the wall a couple times and cried.

I was scared.

After all the tears came the questions. How was I going to

support my family? What am I going to do for a job? The list went on and on and I couldn't come up with many answers.

As it turned out, one of the worst experiences of my life turned into one of the best.

Thanks to a lot of prayers, and support from family and friends, I decided to start Louisburg Sports Zone. Yep, that's right, I went from being unemployed to starting my own business for the first time in my life.

Not exactly the best way to alleviate fears.

However, when I kicked off the site just a month later, I was overwhelmed with the amount of support from students at Louisburg High School, employees throughout the district, parents and several others who offered encouragement and supported my new venture.

I finished the last half of the winter season and all of the spring doing what I took for granted the previous seven years. I got the chance to cover Louisburg athletics again.

You know, this whole starting your own business thing might not have been a bad idea after all. I would have never had the courage to go out on my own had I not been pushed in that direction.

Fast forward to the present and I am still alive and kicking, ready to start my eighth season of roaming the Wildcat sidelines with camera in hand, waiting to tell that next story.

This fall brings a lot of story lines to the Wildcat programs. The football team is looking to improve off its 3-win season a year ago and find its way back to the playoffs with a veteran group returning.

Volleyball is primed and ready to make its fourth consecutive state tournament this year after placing in the top four in

the last three years. The Lady Cats return five seniors that have a lot of state experience and that bodes well for another trip to Salina.

The Wildcat soccer team returns an experienced group from a year ago as they try to crack the top of the Frontier League standings. The cross country team also has several returning runners who will try and qualify for the state meet.

There is a lot to be excited about when it comes to Louisburg sports, but for me personally, I am just fortunate enough to still be a part of it in a small way.

I take a lot of pride in what I do and I hope that it shows when you read stories or look at pictures on this site. I started this business knowing that I will never be rich, but it gives me an opportunity to continue to do what I love.

Thanks to all those who have supported me and for the more than 23,000 views on the site in the last six months. I have said it before, but I am extremely blessed to live in a community that supports each other through good times and bad.

Every day I am fortunate enough to be able to go to work and support my family doing what I know how to do. That is all I have ever wanted, so thank you Louisburg for allowing me to do it.

I am still scared, though.

It is that fear that drives me to do the best I can in what I do in my job and in life. I don't want what happened on that day in January to happen again and I will do everything to make sure it doesn't.

Right now I am living the good life. I have the opportunity to work for myself, support my family and do what I enjoy. I can't ask for any more.

I am living the American dream.

I just don't want to wake up.

Albright reaches new heights at Kansas



University of Kansas junior Jake Albright clears his personal best of 17 feet, 6.5 inches in the pole vault during the regional meet on May 30 in Texas. The Louisburg High School graduate finished 10th nationally in the pole vault on June 10 in Eugene, Ore.

Photo courtesy of Jeff Jacobsen/KAI

LAWRENCE – During his time at the University of Kansas, Jake Albright has had the chance to soar through the air with some of the best pole vaulters in the nation.

Now, after finishing his junior season, Albright has put himself in that elite group.

At the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Eugene, Ore., Albright cleared 17 feet, 4.5 inches to finish 10th in the nation at the historic Hayward Field track on June 10.

Albright, along with his Jayhawk teammate Nick Meyer, who

finished 13th, made Kansas history. It was the first time since 1989 that two Jayhawks finished in the top 15 in the nation in the pole vault.

"I am very happy with my performance," Albright said. "To get 10th place was an awesome experience, no doubt. As with many things, once you attain it you always want more. In a sport like the pole vault, it is hard to be completely satisfied, though, because you are always striving for that next height, or a higher place in the meet."

Albright's finish also gave him some postseason honors as well. The 2012 Louisburg High School graduate earned Second Team All-America honors after placing in Eugene.

"Competing at the NCAA Championships has been a goal of mine since I came to KU," Albright said. "It was an amazing experience to fulfill that goal by advancing to Eugene, Ore., this year. There is no better place to have the championships than Hayward Field. The facility is amazing and the crowd that the meet brings in is excellent.

"I was definitely nervous before competing, but it was a good kind of nervous. I was excited to compete with top notch vaulters, and see how I could perform. Having my teammate Nick Meyer at the meet competing beside me helped calm me down as well. I can't forget my coach, Tom Hays. He is always there keeping me in check. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity."

For his first appearance at nationals, Albright didn't seem too nervous as he vaulted with confidence from the very beginning. He needed just two attempts to clear his first two heights before coming up short in his attempt at 17-8.5.

Just two weeks prior to nationals, Albright put together his best performance of his career. He qualified for nationals in the pole vault on May 30 at the regional meet in Austin, Texas, and did so in a pressure packed situation.

On his final attempt, the Kansas junior cleared 17 feet, 6.5 inches to earn a spot in the national meet. The clearance was also a personal-best for Albright.

Of course it always hasn't been smooth sailing for Albright. Like any college athlete, he has hit his bumps in the road and it came earlier this season.

At the end of the indoor season, Albright and his coach were working on a longer approach and the new way didn't exactly suit him.

"The outdoor season started off kind of shaky," Albright said. "I wasn't quite used to the new approach by the time we started going to meets. I performed subpar in a couple early meets before I went back to the slightly shorter approach. I started jumping better in the latter half of outdoor season and I realized I made a qualifying mark for regionals, and I had a shot at making it to Oregon.

"Things came together just in time for regionals. With lots of help from coach Hays, I feel I have progressed considerably. My approach is getting better each year and I hope to nail down the longer approach soon."

Albright will get another crack at the national meet next season as he enters his senior campaign. He has enjoyed his experience on the Jayhawk track team and he hopes to soar to new heights next year.

"So far my experiences at KU have been great," Albright said. "The campus is amazing, and is always being added on to. Student life at KU can't be beat by many universities. As for track, the panel of coaches we have is one of the best in the nation, in my opinion. I couldn't ask for better guidance and instruction.

"The NCAA championship meet has me excited for the next season more than I ever have been before. There is plenty of work to

do until next year, and I am going work my hardest to make it back to Eugene."

O'Brien, Albright to compete at nationals



University of Kansas senior Colleen O'Brien and junior Jake Albright will compete in the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships beginning today in Eugene, Oregon. Both athletes are graduates of Louisburg High School.

Colleen O'Brien and Jake Albright are about to embark on the most important track meet of their careers.

Beginning today, O'Brien and Albright will compete in the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships for the Kansas Jayhawks in their respective events. The two Louisburg High School alums are two of 11 Jayhawks traveling to Eugene, Ore. for the national meet.

Albright qualified for nationals in the pole vault on May 30 at the regional meet in Austin, Tex. Albright finished ninth and did so in a pressure packed situation.

On his final attempt, the Kansas junior cleared 17 feet, 6.5 inches to earn a spot in the national meet. The clearance was also a personal-best for Albright.

Albright and fellow Jayhawk vaulter Nick Meyer will hit the runway at 6 p.m. today.

As for O'Brien, the Jayhawk senior finished fifth in the high jump at regionals on May 29. O'Brien cleared 5-11.5 to finish fifth overall thanks to a strong final attempt.

She cleared 5-11.5 on her first attempt which put her into fifth place and secured her a spot for nationals. O'Brien needed just three attempts to get over her first two heights of the day, but things would get a little tense.

The top 12 in each event qualify for nationals, and with 14 competitors left, O'Brien was facing elimination at 5-10. On her third attempt, O'Brien was able to clear the bar to keep her season alive.

O'Brien has posted a clearance of 5-10.25 or better in each of her last five outings. She will also become the first Jayhawks to compete in the high jump at the NCAA Outdoor Championships since 1994.

Earlier in the season, O'Brien soared over the bar at 6-0.75 at the Kansas Relays in April to become just the third Jayhawk woman in history to clear six feet.

She will compete in the high jump at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday in Eugene.

Lady Cats gain experience at state meet



Louisburg senior Ashley Ruder makes the turn around the track after getting the baton from teammate Kaitlyn Gaza in the preliminaries of the 4x400-meter relay Friday in Wichita.

WICHITA – There were no trips to the medal stand for the Louisburg girls track and field team but that didn't mean the Lady Cats didn't gain anything from their experience at the Kansas State Track and Field Championships.

Louisburg competed in three events during the meet on Friday and Saturday at Wichita State University.

Isabelle Holtzen had the highest finish of the three as the Louisburg freshman finished 12th overall in the pole vault after she cleared 8 feet, 6 inches. It wasn't the best of conditions either as Saturday morning was blustery and cold inside Cessna Stadium.

"I think with the conditions and everything I thought Isabelle did very well," Louisburg coach Greg Darrington said. "She has had a great season and I couldn't be prouder of her. I think state was a great experience for her and there are only better things to come."

Holtzen has steadily improved over the last month in the event as she has set several personal records. She cleared 9-0 at regionals to finish second and qualify for state after starting the season clearing 7 feet.



Louisburg freshman Isabelle Holtzen clears the bar at 8 feet, 6 inches in the pole vault Saturday at the Class 4A portion of the state meet in Wichita. Holtzen finished 12th overall.

"She is a tremendous competitor and hard worker and that is why she has had so much success this year," Darrington said of Holtzen. "She works hard in practice and she is very coachable. If she keeps that up she is going to be really good."

Freshman Bailey Belcher took to the track on Friday for the preliminaries of the 200-meter dash and competed against the state's best sprinters. Belcher came in 13th in 26.87 seconds.

Belcher had a strong season for the Lady Cats as she scored several points in the sprints all season. She had her best performance in the 200 at regionals when she broke the school record in the preliminaries in 26.17 seconds.

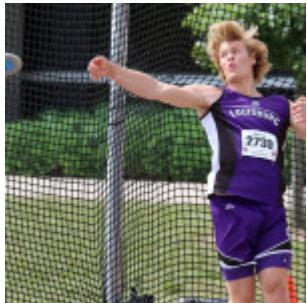
"The thing that impressed me the most about Bailey is how much of a competitor she is and it showed by how disappointed she was that she didn't run her best time," Darrington said. "I think that says a lot about Bailey. She wanted to go out to state and compete against herself and hopefully get a PR (personal record). She was disappointed she didn't do that, but she is a great kid and had a good season."

Also on Friday, the 4x400-meter relay of Kaitlyn Gaza, Ashley Ruder, Makenzie Kallevig and Megan Lemke competed in the preliminaries of the event.

The Lady Cat team ran a time of 4 minutes and 21 seconds to finish 15th overall against some of the state's best. The four runners came off a regional meet where they ran a personal best 4:17, but still had a good season according to Darrington.

"At state it is always difficult if you are just doing one event because there is a lot of standing around and waiting, so it might have been a little tough on them, but I thought they ran ok," Darrington said. "Anytime you get to state it has been a good year and it was a great experience for them."

McMullen wins state title in discus



Louisburg High School senior Connor McMullen lets the discus fly on his final attempt of the Class 4A discus competition Saturday at Wichita State University. McMullen won the state title on that attempt with a throw of 173 feet and 1 inch.

WICHITA – Connor McMullen walked into the back of the discus ring and took a deep breath.

McMullen had one last throw left. One last throw as a Louisburg Wildcat and one last chance to win a state title.

Going into his final throw of the Class 4A state discus competition, McMullen was trailing Baldwin's Christian Gaylord by two feet Saturday at Wichita State University. On his final attempt, McMullen gathered himself spun and let the discus fly.

The Louisburg High School senior truly saved his best for last.

McMullen recorded a toss of 173 feet and 1 inch to surpass Gaylord and capture his first state championship – an event four years in the making.

“It was definitely a relief when I got that last throw out there and I knew that it was going to do the job,” McMullen said. “I have been looking forward to this for a long time and it is a great feeling. A lot of hard work went into this.”



Connor McMullen shares a hug with his father Scott after winning the Class 4A discus title Saturday in Wichita.

Believe it or not, McMullen's last throw of the finals wasn't even the most nerve-racking moment of the competition. That moment came in the final throw of the preliminaries.

McMullen, who came in with one of the top throws in the state this year, scratched in his first two attempts of the preliminaries. Another scratch would mean his season would be over and so would his dreams of a state title.

"Scratching the first two is never fun and is probably one of the worst feelings in competition," McMullen said. "But I knew I only had to throw around 150 (feet) to get in the finals. So I just gathered myself and threw one out there."

That one throw was pretty good. He ended the prelims with a throw of 161-2, which vaulted him to second place behind Gaylord's throw of 163-7.

Then came the finals, and just like the prelims, McMullen got off to a rocky start. He scratched on his first two throws of

the finals, which set up his last attempt.

"I really wasn't too nervous coming in," McMullen said. "I think the most nervous I got was in that final throw to get into finals. The first throw in finals was short so I just went ahead and scratched it. I was hoping to get one good throw going into my last one, but it just so happened that it went out the right side. I just got into the back of the ring, took a deep breath and just tried to do what I do and what felt naturally."

McMullen's family and friends couldn't bear to watch his final attempt and several of them had their eyes covered just waiting to hear the reaction from the crowd. When they heard a loud chorus of cheers, they knew it had to be good.

Unlike his second attempt in the finals, McMullen's final throw was straight on and he all but shored up a state title. Gaylord had one final attempt, but came up several feet short in his last toss.



Connor McMullen looks down on the Cessna Stadium crowd atop the medal stand Saturday after receiving his first-place medal.

"Connor made it a little more dramatic than I liked, but it showed the competitor he is to win like he did," Louisburg coach Gary Griffin said.

McMullen became the first Wildcat to win a state track title since Garrett Griffin won the javelin in 2011. After winning two state medals in the discus in previous years, McMullen was happy to finally grab the gold.

"There is a lot of pride in that," McMullen said. "It is nice to represent my school and win state."

That state title came after McMullen won his first state medal in something that wasn't discus. Despite being seeded 13th coming into the javelin competition Friday, McMullen rose to the occasion.

McMullen medaled eighth with a throw of 164-02 and put together his best series of throws of the year. He set personal records with every attempt in the finals to secure the medal.

"That was a fun one because there was no pressure for me," McMullen said. "I knew that I had a bigger throw in me than what I had done previous. I like throwing on the track surface better than grass so it was good to be able to break out my javelin cleats.



McMullen got his first state medal in the javelin Friday in Wichita with a throw of 164-02 and finished eighth.

"It was just icing on the cake. I was keeping the arm speed up and improving every time. I wanted to get another medal in either shot put or javelin. The shot put didn't go as I would have hoped so I was happy to do it in the javelin."

It was a strong performance since McMullen had only thrown the javelin the last three meets of the season.

"I was happy for him in the javelin too," coach Griffin said. "It was a bonus for the amount of time he put in on that event. It is amazing he won a medal."

Dennis earns state medal in hurdles



Louisburg High School senior Sean Dennis finished in fourth place in the 110-meter hurdles Saturday during the Class 4A portion of the Kansas State Track and Field Championships at Wichita State University. Dennis also ran in the 100 and 200 dashes, along with the anchor leg in the 4x100 relay.

WICHITA – Sean Dennis didn't have much time to waste at the Kansas State Track and Field Championships on

Friday and Saturday.

The Louisburg High School senior competed in four events over the two days and had to try and stay fresh for each race. It wasn't easy, and the results may not have been exactly what Dennis was hoping for, but in the end he left Wichita State University with his first state medal.

In what has been his best race all season, Dennis finished fourth in the 110-meter hurdles in 15.41 seconds in what was a tough field. Osawatomie junior Jacoby Greenwood, who captured three state titles Saturday, won in 14.62 seconds.

"I am a little disappointed because I knew I could have ran better but finishing in fourth place you really can't complain about it," Dennis said. "It is still a medal and I placed top-five, but I could have ran better."

On Friday, Dennis ran in the preliminaries of the 200-meter dash and just missed out on the finals. Dennis ran a personal best time of 22.82 seconds and finished ninth. The top eight in each preliminary make the finals.



Senior Mason Wilde hands the baton to fellow senior Dawson

Christy during the preliminaries of the 4×400-meter relay Friday during the state track meet in Wichita.

Dennis also joined Mason Wilde, Kyle Green and Ben Minster in the 4×100-meter relay, and again, the Wildcats missed out on the final by one spot. Louisburg ran a time of 44.36 seconds to come in ninth.

“I was pretty proud of myself in the 200,” Dennis said. “I was able to PR by quite a bit and still got ninth place. I almost made finals, but I ran my best in that one and that is all I can ask for.”

On Saturday, Dennis ran in the preliminaries of the 100-meter dash and came in 13th in 11.46 seconds. On what was a cold and blustery day that it made it tough to stay warm and loose, Dennis was still able to achieve his goal of a state medal.

“Sean had a good weekend and was very deserving of a medal,” Louisburg coach Gary Griffin said. “He has worked very hard and qualifying in four events is a great accomplishment.”

The Wildcats also competed two other relays. In the preliminaries of the 4×400-meter relay, the team of Wilde, Green, Minster and Dawson Christy came in 15th in 3:36.

Christy, along with Michael Minster, Ben Hupp and Wyatt Reece, also finished in 15th in the 4×800 relay in 9:01.

In the shot put, Connor McMullen finished 12th overall with a toss of 45 feet, 2.5 inches and teammate Jarod Woodward was 14th with a throw of 44-5. Parker Cates finished in 16th in the pole vault.

“It was a good weekend for most of the kids who approached their personal records,” Griffin said. “It was a good

experience for the younger kids and hopefully it will pay off in the future."

Lady Cats have record-breaking day



Louisburg's (clockwise from left) Kaitlyn Gaza, Makenzie Kallevig, Ashley Ruder and Megan Lemke celebrate after finishing third in the 4x400-meter relay Thursday at the Class 4A regional meet at Prairie View High School. The Lady Cat team qualified for state in 4:17.

LA CYGNE – Records fell for the Louisburg girls track and field team Thursday during the Class 4A regional meet at Prairie View High School.

Whether they were personal or school records, the Lady Cats had strong performances in several areas and they were able to punch their ticket to state in three events.

Freshmen Isabelle Holtzen (pole vault) and Bailey Belcher (200-meter dash) joined the 4x400-meter relay team of Makenzie Kallevig, Megan Lemke, Kaitlyn Gaza and Ashley Ruder as they

will all compete in Wichita later this week at the state meet.

Holtzen got the meet started off on the right foot as she put together her best performance of the season in the pole vault. She set a new personal record as she cleared 9 feet and finished in a tie for second place.

"It is very exciting to be able to go to state," Holtzen said. "To be honest, state wasn't even on my radar when the season started. I was just focused on getting better and I got a lot of help along the way from my coaches and teammates. Coach (Kyle) Littrell gave me a lot of tips and worked with me a lot and my teammates were very supportive."

It was a tight race for the final three spots to qualify for state. Holtzen, along with three other vaulters, including teammate McKinley Mathews, were tied at 9 feet.

None could make 9-6, but what set Holtzen apart is she didn't miss until that point. Holtzen was perfect until she missed her three tries at 9-6, which helped her with the tiebreaker.

"Coach Littrell told me coming in that first-attempt makes are going to be big because there could be several of us tied at the end and he was right," Holtzen said. "It was important for me to get off to a good start and luckily I was able to do that."



Freshman Isabelle Holtzen

clears the 9-foot mark in the pole vault Thursday at the regional meet at Prairie View High School. Holtzen finished in a tie for second and qualified for state.

Mathews and Paola's Samantha Van Hoecke had to go to a tiebreaker for the final spot to go to state and Van Hoecke won out after she cleared 9-0 on her first attempt.

As for the 4x400 relay team, the four Lady Cat sprinters picked the best time of the year to run a personal best time. The team finished third in 4 minutes and 17 seconds to earn a spot at the state meet.

"We have worked really hard all season for this," Ruder said. "We have pushed all year to get our personal record and we have always come up short. To finally get it now is just sweet relief."

It is not bad considering the team didn't even know who was going to run their opening leg until minutes before the race started. Ruder, Lemke and Kallevig were waiting to hear who would round out the team and ultimately the coaches decided to go with Gaza.

Gaza, a sophomore, had been battling an injury most of the season and is just now rounding into form. As it turned out, it was perfect timing.

She ran a strong opening leg that was a personal best before she handed the baton to Ruder, who stayed at the front of the pack. Then Kallevig waited for her turn.

"My adrenaline was just through the roof," Kallevig said. "I saw Ashley go with the Paola girls and I was ready to run. I am still a little shocked."

Paola eventually finished second, six seconds ahead of Louisburg and Independence won the race in 4:04.

Still a state berth was on the line and Lemke wasn't about to let it slip away as the anchor leg.

"I just pushed so hard in the beginning and I just couldn't let anyone pass me," Lemke said. "It is just so great to see everything come together."

In the sprints, Belcher qualified for state in the 200 dash and did so in impressive fashion. Belcher had the top time in the preliminaries in 26.17 seconds.

That time set a new school record as Belcher broke Kate Combs' old mark of 26.6 seconds. Belcher went on to finish fourth in the finals.

She almost qualified in the 100 dash as well. Belcher had the third best time in the preliminaries at 13 seconds flat, but finished sixth in the finals in 13.07 in what was a deep regional for sprinters.

The six Lady Cat athletes will begin their journey for a state medal Friday when they travel to Wichita State University for the start of the Class 4A portion of the Kansas State Track and Field Championships.

Events will begin at 2 p.m. and will continue into Saturday.