

# 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 40<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 71<sup>st</sup>.



**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.



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# 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.

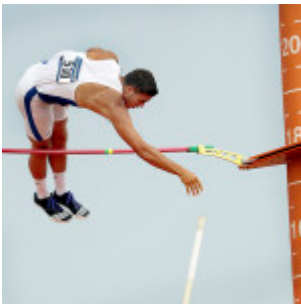
Right now I am living the good life. I have the opportunity to work for myself, support my family and do what I enjoy. I can't ask for any more.

I am living the American dream.

I just don't want to wake up.

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# 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

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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."

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## **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.**

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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.

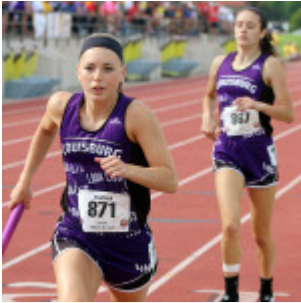
O'Brien has posted a clearance of 5-10.25 or better in each of her last five outings. She will also become the first Jayhawks to compete in the high jump at the NCAA Outdoor Championships since 1994.

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.

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# 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 4×400-meter relay Friday in Wichita.

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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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 4×400-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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.”

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## **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.**

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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.**

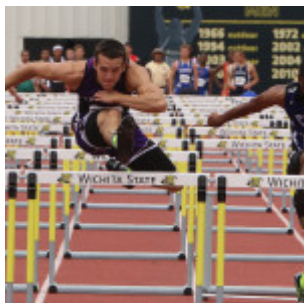
“It was just icing on the cake. I was keeping the arm speed up and improving every time. I wanted to get another medal in either shot put or javelin. The shot put didn’t go as I would have hoped so I was happy to do it in the javelin.”

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.”

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## 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 4×100 relay.

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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.”

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## **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 4×400-meter relay Thursday at the Class 4A regional meet at Prairie View High School. The Lady Cat team qualified for state in 4:17.

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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 4×400-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 4×400 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.

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## **Wildcats qualify 11 for state**

# track



Louisburg's Ben Hupp hands the baton off to teammate Michael Minster in the 4×800-meter relay Thursday during the Class 4A regional track meet at Prairie View High School. The 4×800 relay finished third and qualified for state.

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LA CYGNE – Louisburg boys track and field coach Gary Griffin isn't psychic, but he did have a good feeling about his team the day before the regional meet.

"I told them at practice that we are taking 11 guys to state," Griffin said.

It was kind of a bold statement considering how there is so much unknown at any track meet, but during the Class 4A regional Thursday at Prairie View High School, his vision became a reality.

Louisburg qualified 11 athletes for the state meet and scored points in every event the Wildcats competed. Those athletes will travel to Wichita on Friday for the Kansas State Track and Field Championships at Wichita State University.

The Wildcats finished third in the team standings with 71 points. Paola won the team title with 92 points and Girard was a close second with 90.

Seniors Sean Dennis and Connor McMullen headlined the

Louisburg qualifiers as both will be busy at the state meet this week. Dennis qualified in four events and McMullen qualified in three.

Dennis earned state berths in the 110-meter hurdles, 100-meter dash, 200 dash and was the anchor on the 4×100-meter relay. Dennis joined Mason Wilde, Kyle Green and Ben Minster to win the regional title in the 4×100 in 44.31 seconds.

“I didn’t think gold was in our view, but we really gave it our all,” Dennis said. “I am just so happy that I can help all those guys go out to state.”

By the time the meet was over, Dennis was spent. He ran preliminaries in three events and then ran finals in four events – all in a span of about three hours.

“It is awesome,” Dennis said. “It was my goal since the beginning of the season to qualify in four events and now that I have done that all that is left is to go and place.

“I did decent in the hurdles, and like always I could have done better, but the important thing is to qualify and now I have another chance out at state.”



**Jarod Woodward releases a throw in the shot put**



**Thursday. Woodward finished with a personal record toss of over 48 feet to take third and qualify for state.**

Dennis finished second in the 110-meter hurdles in 15.24 seconds. He later took fourth in the 100 dash in 11.39 seconds and fourth in the 200 dash in 23 seconds.

"It was a tough day for Sean because he didn't have a whole lot of recovery time, so his times weren't great but the whole goal is to qualify and run fast at state," Griffin said. "Your body isn't used to it and it is taxing. I was happy he qualified in the 100 because that was literally five minutes after he ran the hurdles. He will run faster out at state and I think he has a chance to win two or three medals."

McMullen had a good day in the throws for the Wildcats that included a regional title in the discus. Along with that, he also qualified for state in the javelin and the shot put.

McMullen won the discus with a throw of 169 feet, 3 inches to win the event by more than 25 feet and is considered one the favorites to capture the state crown in the event. The other two events were a little closer.

In the javelin, McMullen recorded a personal best throw in his first attempt with a mark of 159-01 and finished third. Not too bad for competing in the event for just the second time this year.

"I looked at the regional a couple weeks ago and the coaches and I didn't see a lot of strong throws so I thought I would give it a try and qualify for state," McMullen said. "I got two practices in before league and one practice before regionals and I was able to get third in both."

McMullen was on the outside looking in for a state berth in

the shot put as he was in fifth-place going into his final throw. That last throw of 47-01 was good enough to get him into state with a fourth-place finish.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he goes out and wins a medal in the javelin," Griffin said of state. "The discus is his thing and I know he is looking forward to winning a state championship, but he is going to have to get off a good one to win it. Everyone has been gaining on him all year. He is a competitor and he has been there before."

Junior Jarod Woodward will join McMullen at state in the shot put as he picked the perfect time to record a personal best throw. Woodward recorded a toss of 48-5.75 on his second throw to finish third.

"It felt pretty good," Woodward said. "I was sick with a migraine so I missed practice but I got about 17 hours of sleep so I was definitely pretty rested. Coach (Greg) Darrington helped me throughout the week on technique that helped me throw the personal record and hopefully 50 (feet) during state."

Along with the 4×100 relay, the Wildcats were also able to qualify its 4×400 and 4×800 relays as well. The 4×400 team of Wilde, Minster, Green and Dawson Christy ran a time of 3 minutes and 35 seconds to finish fourth.

It also a new personal record as they beat their previous time by five seconds. Wilde, who is also on the 4×100 team, will make his fourth trip to state.



**Mason Wilde (right) hands the baton to Kyle Green during the 4×100 relay Thursday. The Wildcat team won the regional title in 44.3 seconds.**

“State is awesome,” Wilde said. “I have been lucky enough to go every year, so senior year is just like every year. All the hard work has finally paid off and it is a good feeling.”

Christy is also making a repeat trip to state and will do so with the 4×800 relay along with the 4×400. Christy, along with Michael Minster, Ben Hupp and Wyatt Reece came in third in 9:02.80.

“It does feel good,” Christy said. “It has been awhile since we had a good 4×800 team so it is great to be able to qualify in that. It won’t be my first time out at state, but for a lot of the other kids it will and hopefully I can be a leader for them.”

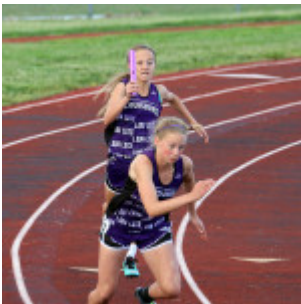
Junior Parker Cates will be making his second trip to the state meet in the pole vault as he finished fourth overall after he cleared 11-0. He was tied with Labette County at 11-0, but Cates won the tiebreaker to advance after he cleared 11 feet on his first attempt.

The Class 4A portion of the state meet will begin at 2 p.m. on

Friday and will continue into Saturday.

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## Belcher racks up points for Lady Cats



Louisburg's Hanna Becker hands off to anchor Bailey Belcher in the final leg of the 4×100-meter relay Thursday during the Frontier League meet in Spring Hill. The Lady Cat relay team finished third.

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SPRING HILL – As just a freshman, Bailey Belcher continues to burn up the track for the Louisburg girls track and field team.

Belcher helped score 26 points for the Lady Cats during the Frontier League track meet Thursday in Spring Hill. She finished runner-up in both the 100- and 200-meter dashes and later helped the 4×100-meter relay to a third-place finish.

Belcher also scored a few points in the field events as she took fourth in the high jump when she cleared a season-best 4 feet and 10 inches.

Outside of the freshman, Louisburg had a little tougher time



coming up with points as it finished sixth with 46.5 points. Baldwin won the meet the 198 points and Paola was second with 173.5.

In the preliminaries of the 100 dash, Belcher recorded the fastest time but was edged out in the finals by De Soto's Tori Marshall. Belcher ran a time of 13.18 seconds to Marshall's 13.08.

Marshall, a senior, once again got the better of Belcher, but not by much. Marshall won the 200 dash in 27.03 and Belcher was second in 27.33. The Louisburg freshman is posting strong finishes despite recovering from a foot injury three weeks ago.

Belcher joined Ashley Ruder, Megan Lemke and Hanna Becker to run the 4x100 relay. The Lady Cat team ran a time of 52.76 to take third.

Also on the track, the 4x400 relay of Kaitlyn Gaza, Lemke, Ruder and Makenzie Kallevig also took third in 4 minutes and 21 seconds. Kallevig, Liz Hildreth, Isabelle Holtzen and Lauren Becker ran the 4x800 relay in 11:26 and came in fifth.

In the sprints, Ruder also scored some points in the 200 dash as she took seventh in 29.78 and Gaza was seventh in the 400 dash in 1:05.

Holtzen continued her improvement in the pole vault as she cleared 8-6, which was a new personal record. The Louisburg freshman came in fourth and junior teammate McKinley Mathews was seventh as she cleared 8-0.

Freshman Haley Earl finished fifth in the triple jump with a mark of 30-4, and another freshman, Sophie McMullen had a throw of 99-8 in the discus to take sixth.

The Lady Cats will try and continue their season Thursday when they travel to Prairie View for the Class 4A regional meet.

The meet begins at 3 p.m., and the top four placers in each event will qualify for state.