

Wildcats take second at Fort Scott to open season



Louisburg senior Ryan Owens works for a pin against Fort Scott on Friday at Fort Scott High School. Owens finished the day 4-0 at 120 pounds.

FORT SCOTT – Despite obstacles that was in its way in the preseason thanks to COVID-19, the Louisburg wrestling team found itself back on the mat Friday in its season opener.

The Wildcats certainly got off to the start it was looking for.

Louisburg went 3-1 at the Fort Scott Duals at Fort Scott High School and finished second overall in a gym that was void of fans. Not having spectators didn't make the success any less memorable.

"I felt a lot of relief," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "There was so much unknown heading into this season – would we get to compete? What will tournaments look like? How will the team respond to changes? It was just like the fall sports season. The anticipation leading up to the first competition was excruciating at times. Then, we got on the bus and drove down south. We got to Fort Scott and then got weighed in. When that first whistle blew, it felt like a huge relief.

"Now, of course we're struggling with conditioning, but some of that's due to kids having been quarantined and only having four days to get in some sort of shape. Most of our guys are

pretty experienced on the varsity level, so we're going to be able to focus on the technique concerns more specifically this week. We nearly filled the whole lineup, only have two opens. Everyone made weight, and they all went out and battled."

The Wildcats got out to a good start as it defeated Blue Valley Southwest, 48-24, and then met the host school Fort Scott in second round. It came down to the last match, but Fort Scott heavyweight Syllvin Roark pinned Elijah Eslinger to hand Louisburg a 47-36 defeat.

Louisburg would bounce back in its third dual as it downed Anderson County, 42-32. The Wildcats then ended on a good note with a 48-28 victory over Prairie View.

"The Fort Scott dual came down to the last match, and we nearly got the pin at 285 for the team victory," Bovaird said. "It was pretty exciting, and I'm proud of how our younger guys stepped up to the challenge and how our older guys set a solid example."

Louisburg seniors Ryan Owens and Alec Younggren both had solid starts to their seasons as each went 4-0. Owens, who competed at 120 pounds, recorded three first period pins and also won by forfeit.

As for Younggren, the Wildcat 220-pounder did the same as he breezed through his opposition with three pins and a forfeit.

"Ryan looked like he hadn't been off the mat at all," Bovaird said. "Just a smooth and natural flow to his movement. This was my first time really seeing Alec wrestle, other than a few live rounds at practice. He looked unstoppable – solid positioning and explosive attacks"



Louisburg junior Johnathan Keegan-Childs works for some back points Friday against Blue Valley Southwest.

Senior Cade Holtzen (126 pounds) also went 4-0, but only got one actual match in and that was second period pin over Anderson County's Masten Wright. Freshman Noah Cotter, 106 pounds, also won all four matches by forfeit.

Junior Johnathan Keegan-Childs had a successful day at 195 pounds as he finished the day with a 3-1 record. One of those victories was a come-from-behind win over Fort Scott's Jed Nash, as he pinned him late in the second period.

Sophomore Kaven Bartlett (132), freshman Traden Noll (138), senior Jacob Briley (2-2) and Eslinger each went 2-2 on the day. Senior Jarrett Hoyle (145) and junior Aiden Barker (182) each also won a match.

"Cade worked his tail off to make weight, and it was

frustrating for him to only get one match," Bovaird said. "He made the most of it though, and looked pretty tough. Johnathan Keegan-Childs had an exciting come-from-behind win against Fort Scott. Jarrett came out his first match looking very focused and strong. Kaven and Aiden both had tough weights at that meet, and while their records don't look outstanding, they both competed really well.

"Noah Cotter went 4-0 just by showing up and taking forfeits. It stinks for him that he didn't get to wrestle, but at the same time, we went so long without a 106-pounder and were just giving those team points away. It's nice to be on the other side of that situation. Traden Noll went out and got his first varsity win of his high school career. I've been working with him with the Wildcat Wrestling Club for a few years now, and it's great to see him transition so well to high school."



Senior Jarrett Hoyle takes his Blue Valley Southwest opponent to the mat Friday in Fort Scott.

Louisburg will be back on the mat this Friday when it travels to Basehor-Linwood for a dual competition with Burlington,

Lawrence Free State and Basehor-Linwood. Matches are set to begin at 5 p.m.

"Thanks to Covid-19, our season is getting drastically reworked," Bovaird said. "The December Duals traditionally hosted by Baldwin got split into two locations. Burlington always has a pretty solid lineup top-to-bottom. Basehor is growing in strength every year – they've got a great youth program and their coach is outstanding. Lawrence Free State is also on the rise in 6A. I've known their new head coach for a long time and I really respect what he's been doing. Friday's duals can be interesting, but I feel like we'll be prepared to step up and take on the challenge."

State medalists look to lead Wildcat wrestling



Senior Ryan Owens flips his opponent to his back during the 2020 state tournament last season. Owens is one of three state medalists who are wrestling for Louisburg this season.

The Louisburg wrestling team finished its 2019-20 season on a strong note as the Wildcats brought home two medals from the Class 4A state tournament.

As good as that season was, the Wildcats are in position to do even better this time around as they bring back several

wrestlers – including the two state medalists back for the upcoming year. Louisburg has been using the last three weeks of practice to get ready for this Friday's season opener.

"Practice has been pretty smooth," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "We've got a variety of experience levels, with more first timers than usual, which is great, but it presents a new set of challenges as well. The team is definitely excited to be back on the mats. With all the changes due to COVID-19, being back in the wrestling room has given us back a little bit of normalcy, which has been much-needed."

The Wildcats will look to several of their seniors for leadership as they bring the most state experience.

Seniors Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen, who both earned medals at state a year ago, return to lead the Wildcats and improve off of last season. Both wrestlers are ranked in the preseason and have chance to make even more history.

Owens, who will wrestle at 126 pounds, took fourth at 120 pounds last season at the state tournament and is currently ranked No. 3 in the state at 126.

Holtzen will also play a big role for the Wildcats. The Louisburg senior took fifth at 126 pounds a year ago at state, and will wrestle at 132 pounds this season. He is also ranked No. 3 in the state at 132 pounds.

"Every day in practice, those two are getting after it," Bovaird said. "They're the kind of athlete that isn't happy with just getting to state or just placing there. They want to improve on last year and give it everything they've got. Both of them have talked about wrestling in college at one point, and I think they'll catch the eyes of some collegiate coaches very quickly.

"I don't like to pay much attention to rankings, but I will admit that it's been nice seeing them get some respect with

the 4A pre-season rankings."



Senior Cade Holtzen, who picked up his second state medal a year ago, will wrestle at 132 pounds for the Wildcats.

It is a rare that a senior would be considered a new addition to a roster, but that is the case with Alec Younggren. The Wildcat senior, who transferred from Olathe South at the beginning of the school year, will provide them with an experienced, proven wrestler.

Younggren finished last season among the best in Class 6A as he took third at state at 220 pounds and will look to improve on that at either 220 or 285 pounds, this season. He is currently No. 2 in the preseason rankings at 285.

"It's a rare thing to get a move-in who's also a state medalists, and we're very fortunate to have him," Bovaird

said. "He wrestled with both Cade and Ryan with the Olathe Southside youth program, so there's an established friendship there. He's a hard worker, and that's been evident from the start. Throw in his experience, competitiveness, and physicality, and he's going to have a great season."

The Wildcats were set to have another state qualifier back in junior Brandon Doles, but Doles suffered a season-ending injury during the football season at will be out. Doles was ranked No. 3 in the preseason at 170 pounds after winning a regional title a year ago.

Despite the injury, Bovaird still expects to field close to a full lineup this year. Sophomore Kaven Bartlett and junior Aiden Barker, who were one win away from qualifying for state last year, will also look to impact the Wildcats at 132 and 182 pounds, respectively.

At 106 pounds, freshman Noah Cotter will begin the season there after transferring in from Platte County (Mo.). Another freshman, Traden Noll, will take the 138-pound weight class and senior Jarrett Hoyle will wrestle at 145.

"We have some great experience returning this year," Bovaird said. "Ryan Owens and Cade Holtzen were both state medalists last year. Alec Younggren has a state medal from 6A, and he's already showing a lot of promise for this season. Kaven Bartlett and Aiden Barker both came one match away from qualifying for state, and they're ready to build on that this year.

"Heading into the season, we had high hopes as a team, but then we found out that Brandon Doles wouldn't be able to return in time from his football injury and Ben Wiedenmann chose not to return this year. Those were two guys with great chances at placing at state. We should have a pretty full team. Our only gaps are at 113 and 160. As long as we're staying healthy, we should be able to continue to fill all the

other weights."

Sophomore Jesse Murphy will go at 152 and senior Jacob Briley will take Doles' spot at 170. Junior Johnathan Keegan-Childs will compete at 195 and sophomore Elijah Eslinger will wrestle at heavyweight.

BovaIRD is also trying cultivate the girls' wrestling program and has three out this season. Junior Bailey Hallas (109 pounds), junior Amber Pritchett (138 or 143) and sophomore Cat Lizar (115) will look to improve throughout the year.

"We're trying to build up our girls team this year and we have three out right now," he said. "It's a start, and I'm happy with the hard work these ladies are putting in. My original plan after last year was to hit the recruiting hard during the spring and then use the summer months to have open mats to teach the basics, but COVID-19 put a halt to that. Our three girls are starting out fresh, but they're really enjoying the sport and working hard to learn the ropes.

The threat of COVID-19 has already made an impact on the Wildcats' season before it has even begun. Louisburg was forced to eliminate many of the tournaments from its schedule and will go to mainly duals throughout the season.

"The first day of practice, we got hit with six wrestlers having to be quarantined due to close contact with positive COVID-19 cases," BovaIRD said. "Then we lost two more for the same reason. Most of them are back now, and despite losing that invaluable mat time, they're getting some great work in and making huge strides. Our competition schedule has changed to be almost all duals and no individual tournaments. Our competitions are smaller, and the majority are weeknights.

"We're having to wear masks when not in direct contact, doing our best to social distance when we can, and paying a lot more attention to hygiene and sanitizing. We're going to have to be flexible. The plan is to try to keep the same practice

partners as much as we can, and to keep the team spread out in the practice room. If a case does pop up, hopefully, we'll only have a small group quarantined and not the whole team."

Louisburg will kick off its season Friday when it travels to the Fort Scott Duals. Matches are set to begin at 3 p.m.

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



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

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

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

spread of COVID-19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This is great news for our kids," Louisburg boys basketball

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

Following the decision by the executive board last week to delay the start of winter sports, Diederich started a Facebook group called “Rally the Troops to Fight for Winter School Sports.”

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

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

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

“I’m very grateful for the chance to get the kids back on the mat,” Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird said. “All year

I've been wondering about the unknowns, whether we'll get a season or not. But we've been practicing for a week and a half, and things are feeling more like normal than they have all year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Sadly, this is what it has come to. Right now all we can do is work together as a team and be each other’s support system. We have to depend on each other to be loud and hype each other up. I still hold hope that this unreasonable ruling will be turned around, but I’m incredibly grateful that I can have one last season with my best friends.”

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

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

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

“I was a little surprised with the no fan policy as I think blanket policies are not good for Kansas,” Diederich said. “We have districts of so many sizes and local decision making is best. Districts know what they can and cannot handle.

Hopefully we can convince KSHSAA to loosen the policy to allow for 1-2 immediate family members, but for now just be happy with the fact that they are playing at all."

KSHSAA proposes delay for winter sports



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

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

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

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

"I consider myself pretty up to date when it comes to issues

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

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

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

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

- No invitational tournaments.

High School Competition Limits:

- Basketball maximum 13 games per team.
- Bowling maximum 8 days per team/individual.
- Swimming and Diving maximum 6 competitions per athlete.
- Wrestling maximum 12 events, 20 competition point max.

Middle School Restrictions:

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

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

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

"Will there be some people that vote yes to delay sports? Yeah I think there will be, just because of the situation their districts are in, but I tend to think a majority of them will vote no. Just as far as how I will be voting, I will vote no

because I think that each school board should be able to decide whether or not to have winter sports. They know their district better than anyone. That is what we did for the fall and I believe the same thing should happen here."

Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird understands the concern with the rising number of COVID-19 cases across the state, but he knows there will also be an impact on the student athletes if these activities are delayed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

decisions by the KSHSAA board."

Wildcat athletes report back for summer conditioning



Almost 80 high school girls attended the first day of summer conditioning on Monday at Louisburg High School.

For the first time in almost three months, Louisburg High School and Louisburg Middle School athletes found themselves back on the field starting Monday at Wildcat Stadium.

It didn't include any balls, equipment, weights and wasn't indoors, but more than 300 athletes participated in the mandatory conditioning drills that were set by the Kansas State High School Activities Association.

"The turnout was exceptional, and considering the limit on group sizes, distance restrictions, and getting creative in using multiple spaces to accommodate the large numbers in appropriately sized groups allowed in phase three, these coordinators did a great job setting a standard," Louisburg activities director Michael Pickman said.

This was all following the cancellation of the spring season to the spread of COVID-19 and KSHSAA allowed school districts to begin conditioning exercises on June 1. The Louisburg

school district started this past Monday and each athlete must participate in 10 sessions before being able to attend in any team activities or camps.

Several coaches were in attendance running athletes through drills in three separate stations that would allow some space between everyone. Football coaches Robert Ebenstein, Ty Pfannenstiel, Joel McGhee and Drew Harding were on hand to lead drills, along with other staff from within the USD 416 school district.

"There are many coaches who are volunteering and just want to be there to support their athletes," Pickman said. "It's what makes the LHS coaching staff stand out from others. However, I have encouraged coaches not directly coordinating weights to stay home as much as they can with numbers restrictions, but so far we haven't had that be an issue."

High school boys begin each morning at 6 a.m., for the hour-long workout and high school girls follow and then it all finishes up with middle school. To start there were 121 high school boys in attendance, 79 girls and 126 middle school students.



More than 120 Louisburg High School boys attended the first day of summer conditioning at Wildcat Stadium.

To start the day, each athlete is screened before the start of conditioning with a temperature check and then they are divided into three groups. Each of them will participate in three stations that focuses on different workouts. There are no more than 45 athletes in a group and the coaches design workouts to promote the six feet of distance.

"There were temperatures that needed to be taken and protocol for sanitizing hands and checking in that went efficiently and smoothly overall," Pickman said. "A lot of planning went into this with the coaches to make sure it went well. And Mr. Holloway (LHS principal) volunteered his time to help take temps at the various sessions."

As far as cross country goes, interested runners instead attend running sessions held by coach John Reece that will take place throughout the summer and they do not have to attend conditioning.

Whenever the athletes have completed their 10 sessions, they are allowed to participate in team activities the rest of the summer. As of right now, everything is on track to allow athletes to begin attending camps after June 29.

"Everything is progressing so far to according to schedule," Pickman said. "Assuming the governor's phase out stage begins when it is supposed to, we will be ready to begin using the weight room, gyms, and sports equipment. Coaches will be able to have practices and then middle school and high school age camps after June 29. The younger kids who do not have to have the 10 days of acclimatization are able to run the week of June 22. With the schedule the way it is, kids should have no problem getting their 10 days of acclimatization needed to participate in camps."

Dennis leaves lasting legacy in Louisburg, LHS athletics



Damon Dennis, and his wife Karla, pose for quick picture during a timeout at a Louisburg High School basketball game Dennis was announcing. Dennis, who is better known as Doc D, is handing over his business at Louisburg Chiropractic Office to Dr. Jacob Polzin and is stepping away as the LHS team doctor after 28 years of service. His last day at the office is tomorrow (Saturday).

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

Doc D – as he his affectionately known – opened Louisburg Chiropractic Office 28 years ago and has served as the Louisburg High School athletic team doctor for almost that same amount of time.

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

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

On Saturday, he will officially leave Louisburg Chiropractic Office and hand the reins over to Dr. Jake Polzin. Add to that, Dennis is also stepping away as LHS' team doctor and will leave an absence on the sidelines and behind the mic that many in Louisburg have come to know.

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

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

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



Dennis (left) and Dr. Jake Polzin pose for a picture in their office. Polzin will officially take over the practice from Dennis after this week, but both have been seeing the patients the last three months.

During the school year, Dennis would leave his place of business every day after 3 to go to the high school to tape up athletes from all different sports and made sure they were all ready to go for practice. After that was over, he would rush back to his office to finish the day treating his patients.

It would be hectic life for some, but it is one that he has treasured for the last nearly three decades.

"My time in practice has been a blessing," Dennis said. "I truly care about all of the patients and people in the community that I have been involved with. I have tried to be a positive impact on the town through my involvement in different organizations. As with any business, there are bumps in the road. I genuinely appreciate everyone who has had a positive impact on me through these years.

"I have poured my heart and soul in to every aspect of my business and involvement in the community, sometimes at the sacrifice of my wife, Karla. I am eternally grateful for her patience and love. Part of the reason why I am handing over the reigns is that I have a lot of making up for time to do."



Damon Dennis (middle) walks out of the locker room with the Wildcat football coaches prior to a game.

Dennis and his family have made a lot of sacrifices during his

time and many of the Wildcat coaches – both former and present – appreciate what he has done for them and their players.

“As far as what he has meant to the community, it is immeasurable,” longtime former coach Gary Griffin said. “He came in the first year and made himself available to all the coaches and was there for whatever the kids needed from the medical stuff, to a new pair of shoes, or money to go to a team dinner. He was even there to lend an ear to a kid that was having issues from girlfriends, teacher issues or problems at home.

“For me personally, he was a cheerleader when times were not good, he was an advocate for kids when I didn’t always know what was going on behind the scenes. I trusted Doc like he was a member of the coaching staff. I told him a lot of things in confidence so I could get his advice knowing it would not go any further. As far as the community goes, he is a pillar and he is involved in everything and is held in high regards by most. It is really hard for Doc to tell anyone no, so most of his days are longer than just his office hours. Doc is going to be missed in so many ways. He is a very humble man and he is very deserving of slowing down and enjoying the fruits of his labor.”

A Small Beginning

Back in June of 1992 is when Dennis began to plant his roots in the town he would begin to call home.

Dennis purchased the small satellite office from Dr. Larry Fulk, who at the time also had a practice in Paola. Dennis was less than a year out of school and was eager to get involved in the Louisburg community.

Two months later, Dennis reached out to then Louisburg High School administrator Doug Chisam and asked if he could serve as the team’s doctor – free of charge. Since August of 1992,

Louisburg High School would not be the same.

Dennis made trips over to the high school for treatment and would also follow many of the team's to their games after work was over. It was a life that would go on to create many memories.

"Jim Knox, Don Meek and Doug Chisam were all very supportive and I am forever in their debt," Dennis said. "I started out just going to all games, home and away, and every sport that I could. At that time I was in the office from 6 am to 7 pm and then off to games 3-4 nights a week. The things I have always enjoyed about being the team doctor was the kids and the coaches. High school athletes have not changed since day one. They want someone who cares about and shows interest in what they are doing. I am still close with a lot of the students who have come through the high school and will continue to be.

"My role evolved over the years. I began doing all the taping before practice and games, Impact testing, announcing basketball and other roles as the coaches requested. I enjoy helping others and that is how my role evolved in to so many other areas. Over the years, the coaches have included me and I will always be grateful to them for allowing me to be a part of the experience."



Damon and his wife Karla pose for a picture in front of his office back in the early 90s.

His role got even bigger when the new high school was built and Dennis was asked if he would like to announce basketball games. He certainly didn't mind having a mic in his hand and loved playing off the crowd and making sure the athletes felt a little extra special.

"We had a girls' tournament and Dave Tappan asked me if I would announce the game," Dennis said. "He thought it would be a nice touch to have an announcer. I am not sure he ever asked me to continue, I just did it. I had to be at games anyway and I like to talk, so it worked out. Dave never said to quit, so I just kept doing it.

"I really did enjoy that. I would try to throw in a little funny once and awhile just to see if people were listening. Dottie Cook had a birthday every game night for several years. Knowing the kids so well, it was fun to add their middle name or nickname at the game."

Tappan, who is currently the USD 416 assistant superintendent, worked as the LHS activities director and principal during many of Dennis' years in Louisburg and the two became quick

friends.

With that, Tappan is well aware of Dennis' work ethic and commitment to Louisburg athletics. In fact, he has seen it firsthand.



Doc D lets out a cheer on the sidelines following a big play during the Wildcats' 2010 state championship game.

"Most people know that Doc doesn't take vacations very often," Tappan said. "In fact, it usually takes a team of us to get him out of the office for more than a day. But in 2010, he and Karla scheduled a trip over Thanksgiving break to Chicago. Well, that was also the year of our run to the state football championship and there was no way he was going to miss it. In typical Doc D fashion, he lined things up to perfection. He takes a 5 a.m. flight from Chicago to Kansas City, has Karla drive him to the Legends off of I-70 and at about 6:30 I'm

picking him up and we beat the team to Salina. When the bus finally rolls in, he looks at Coach (Gary) Griffin with a grin and says, 'What took you so long?' About four hours later we were celebrating a championship.

"The commitment that Doc D has demonstrated over the years to the students of Louisburg schools is second to none. From the football sidelines on a Friday night in the fall, to being behind the mic in the LHS gym during basketball season, Doc always supported the students, the coaches and the administration of USD 416. I am proud to call Damon Dennis my friend."

Beyond The Call of Duty

Running a business can be difficult enough, but when you have other responsibilities on top of all that, it can be stressful at times.

The coaches at Louisburg High School never got that when working with Doc D. Veteran and young coaches alike were amazed at the dedication he displayed.

"Doc D is one of the most honest and honorable men I have ever met," Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley said. "He has donated countless hours and years for helping Louisburg student athletes. He always went out of his way to help anyone and everyone. He wasn't always just helping players. He would always check in on the coaches as well – checking on their well-being, their teams, and their families.

"Doc always went out of his way to make someone feel important and special. He was NEVER too busy for anyone. He will be greatly missed and he is irreplaceable. Thank you Doc D for everything that you have done for my teams, my family and for myself. You are someone I am lucky enough to call a friend."

That dedication would not only be found after school in the evenings, but even before the sun came up as well.



Doc D checks out Louisburg's Hallie Hutsell following an injury during last soccer season.

"Doc D will be greatly missed," Louisburg volleyball coach Jessica Compliment said. "He unselfishly devoted many hours to our athletes and was always a phone call or a text away. I can't count how many times he would meet myself and an athlete or two at the school at 5:30 a.m. prior to departure for a volleyball tournament. Not only was he a great role model and mentor for the athletes, but he served as a great mentor to a young coach for the past 14 years. He will be greatly missed by many."

However, where Dennis is most recognized was on the football sidelines. He did anything from tending to injured athletes, mentoring future trainers and handing out free food or candy to the student section before certain games.

It wasn't gone unnoticed as many around the school and

community know what Doc D has meant to the district.

"If Louisburg had a Mt. Rushmore, Damon would definitely be up there," Louisburg graduate and longtime coach Jeff Lohse said. "Doc is one of the most selfless people that I know. He was always more than willing to help anyone out and never expected anything in return. I consider Doc to be a great friend of mine and this is definitely bittersweet. I wish him and Karla nothing but the best as they open up this new chapter in their lives. Damon will be missed but his legacy in Louisburg will live on forever."

Dennis always made sure to welcome the new coaches to the district and made them feel a part of the family and that was the case with boys basketball coach Ty Pfannenstiel when he came to the school three years ago.



Doc D was presented with a team signed helmet following the team's award banquet two years ago.

"Doc D is the most selfless man I know," Pfannenstiel said. "What Doc gave to this school and community is unprecedented. He cared so much for all of our athletes, there's no way we are going to be able to replace what he brought to this school. I feel bad for whoever is going to come in and try to fill his shoes – he set the bar way too high."

Dennis has been on the sideline for many of Louisburg's greatest athletic achievements, including three state football appearances and has watched many athletes along the way achieve great individual accomplishments.

He knows that he has been blessed to be able to be a part of Wildcat athletics in one form or another the last 28 years.

"As for favorite memories, it is not always about the wins and losses," Dennis said. "The things I have most enjoyed is the time spent with athletes and coaches. The things that go on in the locker room, before and after games were the fun part. I have had a behind the scenes view of some pretty amazing people.

"Obviously the 2010 state football championship is at the top of the list. We had gone to the championship twice and come home in second on two occasions. It was a great group to be around and a great experience. If I had to choose a group of kids that really stand out the most, it would be the seniors my first year here (class of 1993). They welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like I was appreciated. I still speak to members of that class often and consider them friends. It was a really special group. I also loved seeing kids accomplish their dreams of success. Louisburg has had its share of champions and athletes that have gone on to do some amazing things."



Doc D was also good with equipment as he works on Madden Rutherford's helmet prior to a game.

In his last week at the office, Doc D has seen a lot of visitors that have come to thank him for everything he has done. Although Dennis won't be around as much as he used to, he wants people to know that this isn't a farewell – but more of a see you later.

"I want everyone to know how much I appreciate their kind words," Dennis said. "There has been talk of various activities surrounding my career change that have been proposed. While I genuinely appreciate this, I don't think I can handle the attention. My emotions have gotten the better of me and I am not sure that I can handle any celebrations publicly, unless everyone wants to see me cry."

"I am not going away. I just won't be at 11 South Broadway or at the high school every day. Thank you to everyone that has

supported me as I have made every effort to support my community."

No, Doc – thank you...

LHS sports preparing to start back up in June with summer workouts



Kansas high school sports has been absent since the middle of March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that all could change very soon.

During its board of directors meeting earlier this month, the Kansas State High School Activities Association made a change to its summer regulations. Starting on June 1, school employed coaches may begin summer programs as long as it is permitted by the community's health authorities and the school district.

Coaches at Louisburg High School are making plans to move forward beginning the first of June, but they must meet some guidelines to do so.

In the first two calendar weeks in June, athletes will need to attend a conditioning session each day. Those must be completed to be able to participate in a coach's camp or

organized competition.

If an athlete is playing football, they must complete an extra five days of conditioning before being able to participate in competition.

The first two weeks of conditioning sessions will not involve weights, indoor facilities or sporting equipment to ensure safety. Masks will be optional at workouts, but six feet of distance will be in place along with no more than the 90 gathering restriction under the phase 3 guidelines put out by the state.

Then on June 15, barring no setbacks, conditioning will include indoor weight sessions and indoor facilities will be allowed. Coaches will also be able to hold camps and competition throughout the summer.



Louisburg football coach Robert Ebenstein has plotted out summer workouts for his football team beginning with three weeks of conditioning starting June 1

"I think the guidelines were set to help ensure the safety of all student athletes accords the state, along with their physical health as well as the preparation for the season," Louisburg football coach Robert Ebenstein said. "Challenges may be there, but overall they are irrelevant as all the teams in the state have to follow the same guidelines. Our school administrators have been very supportive throughout this process."

Along with the new changes, KSHSAA also lifted the moratorium period at the end of the summer and will allow teams to practice all the way up to the beginning of the school year. Fall sports, however, will take precedence from Aug. 1 through Aug. 15.

For some programs, the changes won't be much different as what they have experienced in the past, other than practicing social distancing through the first two weeks of conditioning.

"We are still allowed to compete in leagues and camps after all athletes have completed 10 days of conditioning/training," Louisburg volleyball coach Jessica Compliment said. "Our summer weights program is changing some this summer, so it gives the players a chance to acclimate back into workouts before putting a ball in their hands.

"When you really look at the schedule, we lost the first two weeks in June (in terms of volleyball skill work), but we gained the moratorium week and have full contact until August 16. The fall season starts on August 17. Normally, we can't have contact, outside of weights and conditioning, after mid-July. This actually gives us about four weeks on the back end of summer to work with the athletes."



Louisburg volleyball coach Jessica Compliment has her normal summer scheduled planned out despite a different start.

Still, the new-look summer won't be without its challenges – especially in the first 10 days of the summer calendar. However, the coaches and athletes will gladly work around the new rules in order to get back together and competing again.

"I think the new guidelines will help kids get back to some normalcy as long as everything continues to get better, but the six feet of social distancing could be challenging when you are coaching a team sport," Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley said. "We will find a way to overcome these challenges and help the kids develop as much as possible."

Coaches have already altered their camp schedules for the summer, and that information, along with a list of camps, can be found [here](#).

As for Louisburg cross country, the runners will also be going through a conditioning period like everyone else. They will meet at the football practice field at 7 a.m. for an hour every morning beginning June 1 and that will continue through the summer.

Since school has been out since the middle of March, coaches have tried to find a way to stay in touch with their players – and like with online schooling – the zoom platform has been a big help for coaches.

“Football has been doing online zoom workout together for those currently in high school every Monday, Wednesday and Friday while we have been out of school, so I have still been seeing them and they have been doing some cardio,” Ebenstein said. “We have as normal of a summer planned as possible. We will have our weights sessions, our team camp, review/skills night, and we will have our contact camp that KSHSAA is allowing.”

With everything going on around the state and the country, everything is still in limbo and dates could have to be altered once again depending on what local officials decide. Even with all that, the coaches believe there will be a fall season.



Louisburg soccer coach Kyle Conley has tried to keep many of his same events for both the boys and girls teams.

"I am confident our fall season will be played," Conley said. "It may have some things that are different, but we will play. I know that the boys are very anxious in having conversations with some of them."

Many of the coaches and players are just ready to return to some kind of routine following the spread of COVID-19 and they hope sports can give that to them.

"As of right now, our season is scheduled, and we'll plan accordingly if told differently," Compliment said. "But for right now, (activities director Michael) Pickman has stressed that for most of the athletes, a return to summer weights/conditioning/activities will be their first taste of 'normalcy.' I'm excited to get back at it and see the athletes

and students again."

Pickman named as new LHS activities director



Michael Pickman (left) was hired as Louisburg High School's new activities director and assistant principal last week following the USD Board of Education meeting. Current Louisburg AD, Scott Hinkle (right), will move to the middle school to serve in the same capacity starting next school year.

Louisburg High School will have a little different look to its activities department for the 2020-21 school year.

Following the USD 416 Board of Education meeting on April 13, Michael Pickman was hired to serve as the school's new assistant principal and activities director. Pickman will replace Scott Hinkle, who has been in that position for the last two years.

Hinkle will remain in the district and will move over to the middle school to serve in the same capacity.

"I had known for a while that I wanted to continue my education by getting a second master's degree, but I didn't really know which area," Pickman said. "I talked with current

administration and was both inspired and encouraged to explore administrative leadership. This is the job I wanted because it meant staying in Louisburg and continuing to work with the staff and coaches who I know have, can and will achieve great things when it comes to our students and student athletes.

"We are a Louisburg family and I want my daughter in the Louisburg community and school system, so I wouldn't have done this anywhere else. The atmosphere from district leadership to the building leadership is top notch and I am ready to grow as an educator and work alongside (principal) Jeremy (Holloway) and the administrative staff at the high school and the amazing coaches and support them."

Pickman has taught English at the high school for the last seven years and has also worked in the Prairie View, West Franklin and Maur Hill Prep school districts.

He has also spent a lot of time in the athletic arena as he has served as the Wildcat boys and girls soccer assistant coach, alongside head coach Kyle Conley, for the last five-plus years.

"It will be tough to give up all aspects of it, but the magic of these soccer programs will be especially difficult," Pickman said. "Kyle has been an amazing person to coach with and his passion is contagious. Getting to start the girls program with him and the immediate success has been amazing. State finals and big wins and the atmosphere – some don't ever get to experience that – and lastly the players, both boys and girls who have graduated and those who remain to carry on the greatness are why I said yes to coaching. They make the whole experience amazing and fun.

"So it will be hard, but I would also not have gone anywhere else to do a different job and so I will still be able to support the soccer players and every other student and athlete through my new opportunity and to do so the Wildcat Way."

As for Hinkle, he spent the last two years as the LHS activities director after coming from Liberal High School. He is excited that his new position at the middle school will allow him to spend more time with family.

"I really enjoyed my time at the high school, even though it was only two years," Hinkle said. "I am leaving behind a great workplace with a great culture and an unbelievable staff. It was not an easy decision."

"I made the move to the middle school to get back some evenings and weekends. I have been an athletic director for 11 years at the high school level in my career, and I was ready to free up some time. I know I am joining another great staff at LMS, and look forward to the new challenge ahead of me."

Owens, Holtzen leave Salina with state wrestling medals



Louisburg junior Cade Holtzen reacts after winning his blood round match Saturday at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. Holtzen finished fifth at 126 pounds.

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

Owens, qualified for state last

year, but left without a win and he vowed to fix that this time around. As for Holtzen, he came up short in his efforts for a second state medal as a sophomore last season and had all the motivation not to come home empty-handed again.

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

Owens and Holtzen left Salina with a state medal during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships on Friday and Saturday at the Tony's Pizza Events Center. Owens made it to the semifinals and wound up earning a fourth-place medal at 120 pounds, while Holtzen finished fifth at 126 pounds.

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

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

“They both have worked on their mindset training all season, and I’m so proud of how it paid off this weekend at state,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They focused on their strengths and the variables that they control – their

attitude, their effort, and their aggression – while at the same time avoiding the tendency to focus on things they can't control. They both acted like they belonged there at state and deserved a state medal. The only pressure they put on themselves was to continue wrestling how they've been wrestling all season and to do their very best. When kids focus like that, they stand a much greater chance of accomplishing their goals.

“These guys (and Brandon included) demonstrated to their teammates that there's a process they need to work through in order to achieve their long-term goals.

Everyone wants to be a state qualifier, a state placer, or state champion, but so many kids don't know how to set process goals or are committed to staying the course along the way. These guys are living proof that the process works.”

Owens caught some people off-guard to start the tournament Friday as he opened with a pin against Abilene's Kaleb Stroda in just over a minute.



Junior Ryan Owens flips Osawatomie's Chance Mitzner to his back during the 120-pound quarterfinal match Friday in Salina. His

biggest upset came in the quarterfinals as he pinned Osawatomie's Chance

Mitzner in one minute to advance to the semifinals and assure himself a medal.

Mitzner, who defeated Owens earlier in the season, was ranked fourth going into the state tournament and Owens was unranked at the time.

In the semifinals, Owens went up against No. 2 Chadwick Stahl from Mulvane and lost a 5-0 decision, but he had already made a statement with his good start to the tournament.

"Starting off the state tournament with two pins was my ideal

start," Owens said. "I got into a position that I had a good feel for and threw both my opponents to their backs in the first period. I've been hitting that move since I was six, so I have a lot of confidence in that position. After my semifinals match Friday, the mindset was that 'we weren't finished yet' and there was still a chance to get the next best thing (third place)."

The upsets continued for Owens on Saturday as he outlasted the No. 5-ranked wrestler, Chanute's Trey Dillow, in the consolation semifinals

in an 8-5 decision to advance to the third place match. That set up a rematch

between Owens and Mitzner, but this time Mitzner got revenge as he pinned the

Louisburg junior in the second period.



Ryan Owens pumps his fist after securing his first state medal Friday in Salina.

Despite that, Owens was thrilled with his state tournament performance

and is already looking forward to next year.

"It felt unreal to stand on the podium," Owens said. "I had started off my freshman year on JV, and my sophomore year I

had gone 0-2 at state, so being able to lock up a state medal, especially fourth place, was an amazing feeling.

"That state performance let me know where I was at in that weight class and I was very happy with it. However it's given me more motivation to do more offseason work than ever and it let me know I have a good shot at the championship next year."

As for Holtzen, he also put together a strong state tournament run, that included a busy Saturday after going 1-1 on Friday. He opened the tournament with a pin of Wamego's Nick Cruickshank in the third period.

Holtzen, who was ranked No. 6 at 126 pounds coming into the tournament, squared off with No. 3 Braden Ledford of Winfield. Ledford, who went on to finish second overall, defeated Holtzen in a close 3-0 decision.

That loss sent Holtzen to Saturday to look for a state medal. He began consolation action as he edged out Anderson County's Ryland Wright in a 3-2 decision.



Junior Cade Holtzen scrambles to keep Pratt's Kaiser Pelland down on the mat during the consolation quarterfinal match Saturday in Salina.

Then in the blood round, Holtzen captured a 2-0 decision over Pratt's Kaiser Pelland to assure himself a state medal and it put last year's disappointment behind him.

"My win in the blood round was a moment of pure elation," Holtzen said. "That was everything I've worked for this past year after I promised myself I would never feel the disappointment I felt after losing in the blood round my sophomore year.

"I thought I wrestled pretty well. I wish I was able to score more points

throughout the tournament especially in my quarterfinals match. But that's something I can work on."

Holtzen then met No. 4 Isaac Novotny from Marysville in the consolation semifinals, and nearly had an upset win himself, but lost a 4-3

decision late in the match. The Louisburg junior responded well in the

fifth-place match as he pinned Chanute's Colton Seely in the first period

After finishing sixth as a freshman, Holtzen was proud to see himself take another step forward and he is looking forward to have another chance next season.

"To stand on the podium meant everything to me," Holtzen said. "That was my goal coming into the season and to accomplish that shows that all of my hard work paid off.

"This performance this year has made me realize how close I am to the top wrestlers in the state. It's all a point or two difference. That difference has made me understand that I am capable of being a state champion and that will be my goal for my senior year. It is the one thing I have never accomplished in wrestling and something I want to happen before my career is over."



Louisburg head coach Bobby Bovaird (right) and assistant coach Brandon Ott celebrated Owens' quarterfinal win on Friday.

Doles

also made a run at a state medal but found himself on the wrong-side of a loaded 160-pound class.

The

Louisburg sophomore lost a difficult match to start the tournament as he was pinned by Rock Creek's Drew Burenheide, which meant he had a long journey to a state medal wrestling on the back side.

Doles responded with a 7-2 decision over Winfield's Trevin Biddle and then pulled off an upset of Independence's Ian Lawson with a 3-2 victory. Lawson, who was ranked No. 4 coming in to the tournament, had defeated Doles three times this

season.

That

put Doles in the consolation quarterfinals match against No. 3 Cael Johnson of Burlington and Doles was pinned in the second period.

“Brandon

wrestled really tough at state,” Bovaird said. “He was in total control his

first match, and about to add to his lead when he got caught. If that hadn’t

happened, there’s a very good chance he could have come through on the back side

for a state medal. As it was, Brandon had a tough road in front of him and he

gave it everything he had. He got a revenge win against an Independence senior

who’d beaten him three times this season and then ran into a tough senior who’s

committed to wrestle at Baker University next year.”



Sophomore Brandon Doles keeps his opponent on the mat Friday during the 160-pound match in Salina.

With

two state medalists, the Wildcat wrestling program is looking for even bigger things next season as they return all but one senior from their team and they hope to make another run at multiple state medals.

"Next year is going to be an exciting year," Bovaird said. "We're only losing one senior – Sam Kratochvil – and his leadership will be missed. We're returning two state medalists and a two-time state qualifier. There are two others who had been ranked throughout the season (Kaven Bartlett and Ben Wiedenmann), as well as two others who made solid runs at regionals (Aiden

Barker, who lost in the blood round, and AJ Reed, who was two matches from qualifying). Their experience and leadership will be a solid model for the new and returning wrestlers to follow.

“We'll be working to continue building our numbers and to further develop our girls wrestling program next year. There's a big number of middle school wrestlers who will be joining the program in the next two years, and I'm excited to see what they can do with the foundation that's being set by our current wrestlers.”

Holtzen wins regional title; Wildcats send three to state



Louisburg wrestlers (from left) Ryan Owens, Cade Holtzen and Brandon Doles qualified for the Class 4A state wrestling tournament after all three made it to the regional finals Saturday in Louisburg.

Three Louisburg wrestlers advanced to the biggest tournament of the season and did so in front of

their home fans.

Ryan Owens (120 pounds), Cade Holtzen (126) and Brandon Doles (160) qualified for the Class 4A state tournament Saturday during the 4A regional tournament held at Louisburg High School. All three had solid performances against some tough competition.

Holtzen captured the 126-pound regional title, while Owens and Doles both finished as the regional runner-up.

All three will compete at the state tournament beginning this Friday in Salina.

“With all the craziness of hosting the regional tournament, I’m very proud of how the team performed overall,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “It was great having three guys make the finals.”

Holtzen (35-3), who is heading to state for the third consecutive year, won his first regional crown with a dominant performance in his bracket. He opened the tournament with pin of Tonganoxie’s Logan Wake and then pinned Baldwin’s Lucas Hopper in just 54 seconds in the semifinals.

All that set up a championship match against Piper’s Nick Lawson, and Holtzen was control of the match from the opening whistle as he recorded a 13-1 major decision.



Junior Cade Holtzen won the 126-pound regional title Saturday during the 4A regional tournament in Louisburg.

“Being a regional champ is a really good feeling,” Holtzen said. “I haven’t been able to accomplish that my first two years so to be able to get that was almost a weight off my chest and going to state again is a huge deal. You almost start to take it for granted and last year at state I was definitely humbled, so I am ecstatic about going to state this year, but I’m not done yet.

“I feel I wrestled pretty well overall. There are a couple of areas I can touch up on, so I’ll be doing that in practice this week. But you can always get better so you can never be complacent. And the competition at state is always the best that there is so you have to be at your best.”

As for Owens (35-6), the Louisburg junior opened with a 15-0 technical fall over Ottawa's Trevor Kaub and then defeated Baldwin's Jesse

Hopper by a 9-4 decision in the semifinals to earn a spot in the championship match and secured a state berth.

Owens faced off with Tonganoxie's Grayson Sonntag in the finals. Sonntag, who is ranked No. 1 in Class 4A, defeated Owens by a 12-4 major decision. Despite the runner-up finish, Owens is excited for his second trip to the state tournament.

"Being able to go to state again is a great opportunity for me to compete against the best in the state," Owens said. "I had worked harder this year than any other year in order to go back to state. The past couple years of my high school career had not gone as planned, but this year I have a great shot at winning some matches.



Louisburg junior Ryan Owens finished second in the 120-pound class during Saturday's Class 4A regional tournament at LHS.

"Overall, I was able to make it into the finals and face off against the No. 1 ranked wrestler in the state, which I was really excited

about. I had lost my semis matches in the past couple meets and was finally

able to pull off a semifinals win when it really mattered for regionals."

Doles (31-9) faced a similar road

to Owens as he opened with a pin of Paola's Corey Holub and then recorded a

15-0 technical fall over Baldwin's William Damet. That set up a championship

match against another top-ranked wrestler.

Doles was matched up against Piper's

Anthony Ferguson, who is the No. 1 wrestler in 4A at 160 pounds. Ferguson pinned Doles in the second period, but the Wildcat sophomore earned his second consecutive trip to state.

“Both Ryan and Brandon had tough match-ups in the regional finals, but I’m proud of how they battled against their opponents,” Bovaird said.



Sophomore Brandon Doles took second at 160 pounds during the 4A regional tournament Saturday.

The Wildcats nearly had two more earn a trip to state as freshman Kaven Bartlett and sophomore Aiden Barker each found themselves one win from a state berth.

At 113 pounds, Bartlett (28-12) made his way to the blood round despite a tough 6-4 loss in the first round to Atchison's Archer Willis. Bartlett battled back to the consolations semifinals, where he eventually fell in a 3-1 decision to Paola's Charlie Zeller.

As close as that match was, Barker's consolation semifinal match was even more dramatic. Barker found himself in a back and forth match against Paola's Ben Timpe and nearly had a 2-point takedown at the buzzer.

Barker put Timpe on his back as the buzzer sounded, but was ruled just out of bounds as time expired and lost a 9-8 decision.



Sophomore Aiden Barker takes down an opponent for two points. Barker and teammate Kaven Bartlett each finished one win away from qualifying for the state tournament.

“I’m super proud of those two and how much of a fight they put up,” Bovaird said. “They both truly took on a predator mindset, which we’ve been talking about all year. Some of the best wrestling I’ve ever seen from those two happened this weekend. It is heartbreaking, but some good came of those tough losses. Both of them have been at practice this week helping their teammates, and I think they’re both willing to commit to even more off-season wrestling to help them get to their goals.”

The Kansas Class 4A State Wrestling Championships begin at 10 a.m. on Friday at the Tony’s Pizza Event Center in Salina and the top six in each weight class will earn a medal.