

# Louisburg finishes runner-up at Wildcat Classic



Louisburg junior Thad Hendrix won the 106-pound title during the Wildcat Classic on Saturday at Louisburg High School. Hendrix recorded five pins on the day as the Wildcats had eight wrestlers place in the top four.

It had been almost a month since the Louisburg wrestling team hit the mats for any kind of competition.

Due to a postponement of their final tournament before the holiday break, the Wildcats have spent the last 3-plus weeks stuck in the practice room – working against each other.

Needless to say Louisburg was happy to see different competition Saturday and it showed. The Wildcats had a chance to compete in the Wildcat Classic – their home tournament – and put on a show in front of their home fans.

The Wildcats finished second in the team standings and had eight wrestlers finish in the top four. Louisburg recorded 186.5 points to get the runner-up trophy and finished just behind champion Tonganoxie, which finished with 205 points.

“I was telling the guys how in the program’s second season in existence, then head coach Don Meek started the Louisburg Invitational,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “It’s a tournament with a strong history, and as far as I can tell,

our second place finish was the highest finish we've had since 1998 when the team won the tournament. Fifth place is the highest we've finished since I got here. I was very proud of the team's performance Saturday. It's our third team trophy this season, and we're just now nearing the halfway point of the season."

Several Wildcats found their way to the medal stand when it was all said and done, but one stood higher than that rest.

Junior Thad Hendrix responded with a big performance as he won the 106-pound title with a 5-0 record on the day and all five wins were by pin. Hendrix pinned Baldwin's Benton Flory in just six seconds in the championship match to improve his record to 13-4 on the year.

"I'm stoked for Thad's successes this season," Bovaird said. "For two years, he's had to wrestle against heavier kids – he was a light 106-pounder his freshman year and last year he bumped up to fill our 113 weight class – but now he's the big man at 106. He's got confidence and aggression. Even in his finals match, he never let the fact that it was the finals deter him. He got aggressive and went out there to score a 6-second pin to secure the championship."

Teammates Nathan Keegan (120 pounds) and Mason Koechner (285) also made their way to the championship match, but both suffered their first loss of the season and each took second overall.



**Austin Raetzel finished third at 195 pounds Saturday in Louisburg.**

Koechner, the No. 2 ranked heavyweight in Class 4A, squared off with Pittsburg's Kayne Hutchinson – the No. 1 heavyweight in Class 5A, defending state champion and an all-American. The Louisburg senior took a 3-2 lead early in the match on a reversal, but gave up a pair of takedowns as the match went on.

Earlier in the day, Koechner earned a bye and had three pins to improve his record to 17-1 on the season.

“Mason's only had two matches go into the third period this season,” Bovaird said. “That's difficult for kids because when they finally get to the third period against a tough opponent, they're not used to the feeling of exhaustion that you only

feel when you're that far into a match.

"Mason handled his match pretty well. I don't think conditioning was a major problem; he was just up against a very tough opponent. Mason was able to get a reversal on him, despite giving up two takedowns. That's going to be a major focus for Mason this season – being strong on his feet."

Keegan saw his first action of the season Saturday and started off strong with four straight wins, including three pins and a major decision. The returning state qualifier advanced to the championship at 120 pounds, but came up short against Tonganoxie's Aidan McClellan in a 10-2 major decision.

"Nathan looked strong in his first four matches," Bovaird said. "In his finals match, I thought he was a little on the conservative side. It's like he was wrestling not to lose, instead of wrestling to win. I'd rather our guys take chances and learn from them now so they're more confident as we get closer to the end of the season. Regardless, it's great having him back on the mat. He's a strong wrestler and is poised to have a pretty good senior season."

Louisburg had five other wrestlers that found their way to the medal stand. Junior Tucker Batten (132), sophomore Austin Moore (170), senior Austin Raetzel (195) each finished third, while junior Ryan Adams (138) and senior Ben Hupp (182) each finished fourth.



**Senior Ben Hupp finished fourth overall at 182 pounds at the Wildcat Classic.**

Batten overcame adversity in his third place match as he went up against Baldwin's T.J. Hopper, a returning state qualifier. Just seconds into the match, Batten suffered a broken nose, but he battled through it and he recorded a takedown late in the third period to get the 2-1 decision.

"Tucker showed a lot of guts by finishing the match the way he did," Bovaird said. "I know how painful a broken nose can be, and he was as tough handling it as I've seen any kid be with a broken nose. That late takedown in his third place match against a state qualifier was a huge step for him. It showed that he can win those tight matches and it showed that he's going to be a competitor this season."

Moore also had a big day as he earned a couple pins before falling to eventual champion – and an all-American – in Prairie View's Joey Ewalt. He responded with an 11-6 decision over Blue Valley West's Aaron Davis in the third-place match.

Raetzel recorded a pair of pins to start the day at 195 pounds, but after two losses, pinned Blue Valley West's Logan Caldwell in 55 seconds to take third.

Adams, who started the season at 145 pounds, moved down to the 138-pound weight class and started the tournament with three wins, including two pins and a technical fall. He later lost his third-place match to Leavenworth's Joey Hancock by an 8-4 decision.

Hupp also had a good day as he won three of his first four matches, all by pin, before losing a 14-7 decision to Pittsburg's Christian Hyde in the third-place match.

Tucker showed a lot of guts by finishing the match the way he did. I know how painful a broken nose can be, and he was as tough handling it as I've seen any kid be with a broken nose. That late takedown in his 3rd place match against a state qualifier was a huge step for him. It showed that he can win those tight matches and it showed that he's going to be a competitor this season.



**Sophomore Blue Caplinger records one of his two pins on the day during his 160-pound match.**

Blue Caplinger (160), Garrett Caldwell (182) and Terry Allen (220) each finished fifth overall, while senior Owen Staver (170) was sixth. Dylan Meyer (8<sup>th</sup>) and Alec Maler (11<sup>th</sup>) also wrestled for the Wildcats.

After three straight losses to start the day, Caplinger ended the day strong as he trailed by nine points in his consolation bracket match, but rallied to pin Baldwin's Scott Harman in the third period.

In the fifth-place match, Caplinger also found himself down five points to Blue Valley West's Drew Anderson, but responded with another third-period pin to avenge a loss early in the tournament.

“I ended up giving our weekly ‘Wildcat Award’ to Blue for his last two wins,” Bovaird said. “He had some tough competition this weekend, starting the day 0-3. In his last two matches, he showed a ton of courage and determination by coming back to pin his opponents.”

After being without competition for weeks, the Wildcats have a busy few days ahead of them. Louisburg will host senior night at 6 p.m. today for a dual with Gardner-Edgerton.

The Wildcats will follow that up Saturday when they travel to the Topeka Invitational.

“Normally, when we hit the mats in January, it’s a rough start to the new year,” Bovaird said. “We’ve been off the mats for a while, guys are heavier, conditioning is low, and we have to learn the hard way that there’s a lot of work to do. Saturday, though, I thought the guys were pretty tough. There’s still some conditioning we need to do, but for the most part, we didn’t lose matches because we ran out of gas. I’m feeling pretty encouraged about that fact.”

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## Top 10 stories of 2016



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



to 2017.

## **10. LHS golf qualifies three for the state tournament**



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

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

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

## **9. Tappan, Conklin win state debate crown**



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

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

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

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

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

Sophomores Isabelle Holtzen and Grayson Anderson found

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Louisburg sent three teams to the 89<sup>th</sup> Annual National FFA

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## 4. Griffin signs with New Orleans Saints



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



**in August.**

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

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

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

### **3. Wildcat football rallies around coach, ends playoff drought**



**The Louisburg High School football team celebrates its**

**regional championship and its first playoff win in four years.**

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

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

## **2. Girls soccer team wins regional crown during inaugural season**



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

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

The Wildcats had every reason to be excited.

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

# 1. Boys soccer advances to state final four



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

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

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

There was no imagining this time around.

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

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

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

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## **Koechner wins title, Wildcats second at Eudora**



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner finished in first place in the 285-pound bracket Saturday at the Eudora Tournament of Champions. Koechner was 8-0 on the day with eight pins on the way to the title.

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EUDORA – When Mason Koechner walked onto the mat, almost everyone on the Louisburg side knew what was going to happen next.

Most of the time it only took a minute or two. Koechner rolled his opponent to his back. The referee blew his whistle and slapped the mat.

Pin.

Koechner did that eight times over the two-day Eudora Tournament of Champions last weekend and came out on top as he won the heavyweight title with an 8-0 record. He improved his overall record to 14-0 this season with 12 pins.

On Friday, Koechner cemented himself as one of the best wrestlers in Wildcat history as he became the sixth wrestler ever in the program to earn 100 wins in his career. He joins past wrestlers Tim Dozier, Sonny Ewalt, Chad Roberts, Bryce Hood and Austin Hood for the honor.

“Mason is off to a great run so far,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Mason grew from a 195-pound freshman into the 220-pound weight class the last two years. He’s gotten taller and after a full summer of lifting, he’s filled out his weight class pretty well.

“He’s the first Wildcat wrestler to reach 100 career wins since I got here. I’ve been in his corner quite a bit these last four years, but you really have to credit him for all the hard work he’s put in, and you have to credit his parents, Scott and Beth, for instilling that mentality in him and being so supportive of his athletics over the years.”

Koechner wasn’t the only bright spot on the weekend – in fact – the whole team was. Louisburg had its highest finish ever at the Eudora Tournament of Champions as the Wildcats finished second overall with 243 points. Emporia won the tournament with 257.5 points.

Louisburg, which held team lead and several points throughout the tournament, also had 11 wrestlers place in top eight and five finished in the top four.

“It was definitely exciting from the very beginning,” Bovaird said. “Because we fielded a full squad, with the exception of an open at 113, it helped us earn points right off the bat. Only one or two other teams had full rosters. I saw from the early rounds that we were doing well, getting lots of pins

here and there, but I didn't think we'd be able to compete with Emporia or Tonganoxie once we got into the championship bracket of the tournament. I was very pleased, and the great part about it was the fact that throughout the tournament, the kids kept commenting about where we were at in the team standings. They were getting into the competition and the team title race, and I think that helped their individual performances.

"We've got a lot of wrestlers who have come up through the kids wrestling ranks, but the thing they haven't been a part of until they get to high school is the team component of the sport of wrestling. These guys have learned how to operate as a team, to care about one another, and to step up and do their part for the team. In other sports, they can disappear with the masses, but in wrestling, it's plain and apparent. Our guys came together just right this weekend."



**Sophomore Austin Moore, 170 pounds, finished fourth overall with a 4-2 record in Eudora.**

Junior Thad Hendrix found himself in the 106-pound championship match and went on to finish second. Junior Kyle Allen (126 pounds), sophomore Austin Moore (170) and senior Ben Hupp (182) each came in fourth to help lead the Wildcats throughout the weekend.

Senior Austin Raetzel (195) finished fifth overall in his weight class, while junior Tucker Batten (132), junior Ryan Adams (145) and senior Dylan Meyer (152) took sixth. Sophomore Blue Caplinger (160) and Garrett Caldwell (182) came in seventh.

It all started with Koechner as he breezed his way to the championship match. Koechner, the No. 2 ranked wrestler at 285 in Class 4A, matched up against No. 4 Sam Christy from Spring Hill.

The championship match was a battle until Koechner was able to put Christy on his back late in the third period.

“Mason’s discipline, conditioning and instinct kicked in at the right time and he was able to catch Christy,” Bovaird said. “Sam is an athletic heavyweight, too, but I like Mason’s style up against him.”

Hendrix improved his record to 10-4 on the season as he earned a spot in the bracket with a pair of pins and a major decision Friday. On Saturday, Hendrix defeated Effingham’s Austin Hager by a 4-1 decision, before falling to Wellsville’s Ryan Ware in the championship match, 15-3.

Moore won his first four matches of the tournament at 170 pounds before he went up against Holcomb’s Chance Rodriguez, the No. 3 ranked wrestler in 4A. Rodriguez defeated Moore 11-3, but the Louisburg sophomore bounced back to earn a spot in the third-place match after he pinned Lansing’s James



Schafer, but lost to Shawnee Mission East's William Schmidt, 9-2, to take fourth.

Both Hupp and Allen overcame losses on the first day to find their way to the third-place match.

Allen made his way into the 126-pound bracket and won his first match with a pin of Wellsville's Ethan Ewing, a state qualifier in Class 3A from last season. After losing in the semifinals, Allen defeated Efmfingham's Karl Scholz in a 6-2 decision before losing to Spring Hill's Noah Nemer in the third-place match.

As for Hupp, he lost his quarterfinal match to start Saturday, but responded to pin Caldwell and Shawnee Mission South's Caleb Cossairt to advance to the third-place match. Hupp fell to St. Mary's Matthew Cruickshank in a first period pin to take fourth.



**Louisburg junior Tucker Batten took sixth overall at 132 pounds during the Eudora Tournament of Champions on Friday and Saturday.**

“Those guys all had some exciting matches, and they each stepped up at the right times,” Bovaird said. “Thad wrestled with more confidence than I’ve ever seen him have. His mindset was just like last season at regionals in the match to qualify for state – except more focused, more intense. Even in the finals, against a tough Wellsville kid who placed at state last year, he was competitive.

“Austin has been a warrior, and being a year older, he’s much more confident and he’s much stronger. That’s a young man who doesn’t make excuses, who battles regardless. Ben is our “comeback kid,” the kind of wrestler who is dangerous up until the final whistle. He lost a tough match Friday night because of a couple mistakes and a constant bloody nose that had to be treated four to five times, but when he had a rematch with the same kid later in the tournament, he came out looking for revenge.

“Kyle Allen has been one of the most coachable kids I’ve worked with here. He’s constantly asking for tips and suggestions, and he is very willing to try new techniques and adjustments. I can ask him to modify a technique he’s been using throughout the years he’s wrestled, and instead of fighting a change to new techniques, he embraces it and gives it a whirl. That mentality has opened up matches for him and especially at Eudora, allowed him to catch and pin a state qualifier.”

The Wildcats did have a few bumps in the road as Batten and Adams had to default out of their fifth-place match. Batten suffered a head injury in his final match, while Adams reinjured his elbow.

Even with some bumps and bruises, Louisburg is gearing up for

its final tournament before the holidays as it travels to Tonganoxie on Saturday for the Randy Starcher Invitational.

“I love the fact that on the way home from the tournament Saturday night, I was thinking about how things could have worked out differently in our favor,” Bovaird said. “I was disappointed we didn’t get the team title. It was only three years ago that we just had one kid in the top 8. Now we’re in the hunt for the title. We have a lot of work to do ahead of us, but I’m definitely excited about our prospects for this season.

“I don’t know what to expect this weekend going into the Christmas break. We’ve got finals, we’re banged up, and we’re fighting through the bug season. I do know that whomever we put on the mat at Tonganoxie is going to step up and perform.”

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## **Wildcats finish runner-up at Fort Scott tourney**



The Louisburg wrestling team finished second at the Fort Scott Duals Tournament on Saturday at Fort Scott High School. Members of the team (from left) are Tucker Batten, Blue Caplinger, Kyle Allen, Dylan Meyer, Terry Allen, Mason Koechner, Ryan Adams, Thad Hendrix, Austin Raetzel, Harrison Laney, Tanner Belcher, Ben Hupp and Austin Moore.

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FORT SCOTT – It may have been the first tournament of the season, but the Louisburg High School wrestling team looked like it was in midseason form at times.

The Wildcats competed in the Fort Scott Duals Tournament on Saturday and came away with the runner-up trophy after rolling to four victories. After losing to Class 5A state-ranked Blue Valley Southwest to open the day, Louisburg won its next four matches by an average of 42 points.

Louisburg defeated Fort Scott (60-24), Shawnee Mission West (69-9), Anderson County (51-26) and Paola (63-18) after losing to Blue Valley Southwest (46-21) to finish in second place overall.

“I think it was definitely a nice way to start off the season,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Going 4-1 at Fort Scott was a good confidence booster for our guys.”

The tournament brought out a lot of positives for the Wildcats, which included perfect performances from senior Mason Koechner, junior Ryan Adams and sophomore Austin Moore.

Adams, who is the No. 4 ranked wrestler in Class 4A, got a big win against Blue Valley Southwest’s Matt Stack, who is ranked No. 5 in Class 5A. Adams went into overtime before pulling out a 3-1 decision in his first match of the day. He finished the day 5-0 with two pins to go along with the overtime win.

Koechner, who is currently the No. 2 ranked heavyweight in Class 4A, had an easy day with three pins to go undefeated. Moore also had a big day at 170 pounds as he wrestled five matches, with four of those coming by pin.

“Ryan’s first match against the (Stack) was a great test for him,” Bovaird said. “It went to the wire with Ryan winning in overtime. Between the Osawatomie dual and Fort Scott, Mason

had two forfeits and four pins. He's only been on the mat a little over three minutes in total. I think he's going to have some dominant wins up at 285 this season.

"Austin had four pins and one tech fall, outscoring his opponents 28-0. That's pretty good for a sophomore. With his strength, speed and coachability, I can see him having one heck of a season this year."

Junior Tucker Batten (132 pounds), senior Ben Hupp (182) and senior Austin Raetzel also had strong performances as all three wrestlers picked up four wins on the day. Hupp and Raetzel each tallied three pins, while Batten had a pair of pins.

"Tucker's only loss was 4-0 to a Southwest kid," Bovaird said. "Ben was beating his Anderson County opponent 8-5 when he got caught and pinned. That kid had beaten Ben out at regionals last year in the match to go to state. I've seen a lot of confidence and technique improvements in him already."

"Austin is a tough kid to wrestle. He stronger than he looks, and he looks pretty strong. He's stubborn to move and he's been working on some areas in the off-season that are already showing with his wrestling this season."



**Senior Dylan Meyer pulls an Osawatomie wrestler to the mat for a takedown Thursday in Louisburg.**

Five other Louisburg wrestlers had winning records on the day. Junior Thad Hendrix (106), junior Kyle Allen (126), sophomore Tanner Belcher (138), sophomore Blue Caplinger (160) and senior Terry Allen (220) ended the tournament 3-2.

The Wildcats' lone loss came against one of the tougher teams they will see all season. Blue Valley Southwest is currently ranked seventh in Class 5A, but Louisburg bounced back nicely for the runner-up finish.

"Blue Valley Southwest is definitely the real deal this season," Bovaird said. "They're ranked in Class 5A, and they have 6-7 kids ranked in the top six at state. Four matches we lost were by decisions – Kyle Allen lost 5-3, Tucker Batten

lost 4-0, Dylan Meyer lost 10-4, and Blue Caplinger lost 3-1 in overtime. We were open at 120, also, with no back-up there.

“Considering things, I was feeling positive about the dual, but I also want to be able to get out there against a team like that and compete head-to-head. I want it to come down to the wire. That’s when we know for sure that we’re making progress. Right now, I have a good feeling about where we’re going as a program, but I’m still looking for concrete proof to affirm that.”

Louisburg will get another tough test starting Friday when it competes in the Eudora Tournament of Champions. The tournament begins at 1:30 p.m. and will continue through Saturday.

### **LOUISBURG WINS OPENER AGAINST OSAWATOMIE**

Louisburg would have liked to wrestle a few more matches, but the Wildcats put together a solid performance in their debut Thursday against Osawatomie.

The Wildcats defeated the Trojans 57-18 in their first dual of the season at Louisburg High School. Osawatomie was open at several weight classes and the Wildcats wrestled just eight varsity matches.

Thad Hendrix opened things up at 106 pounds and lost a tough 9-8 decision in a back-and-forth match. At 138 pounds, Tanner Belcher picked up a 7-3 decision and Dylan Meyer followed that up with a pin at 152 pounds.

Blue Caplinger lost a close 9-6 decision at 160 and Ben Hupp was pinned at 182. The Wildcats finished the day strong as they got pins from Terry Allen (220) and Mason Koechner (285).

Not only did the Wildcats celebrate a win, they also welcomed back several former Louisburg wrestlers as they hosted an alumni reunion. Close to 30 alumni were on hand to watch the

Wildcats.

“I love the idea of having an alumni reunion every year, and I’ve gotten so much positive feedback from our alumni,” Bovaird said. “We have some guys talking about getting it planned out even earlier next year – send out letters several months in advance, doing a dinner for the alumni and their families, etc. It’s pretty exciting, too. I have a limited amount of artifacts from throughout the years (pictures, newspaper clippings, etc.), and I’d love to have more stuff to set out for the guys to look at and reminisce.

“I loved having the season start off so well – we had a great crowd considering it was a single dual, the student body presence was pretty fantastic, the drum line played before the meet and between matches, and we were able to recognize the alumni who could make it. There were some competitive matches against Osawatomie, too, at both JV and varsity. That’s always a positive for the team and our program.”

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## **Louisburg wrestling primed for big season**



Louisburg senior Mason Koechner will move up to the heavyweight division this season after finishing third at 220 pounds at the state tournament last season. Koechner is one of



**three returning state qualifiers from last year.**

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It would be easy for a team to rest on its laurels after it had one of the best seasons in program history.

The Louisburg High School wrestling team qualified five for the Class 4A state tournament, had a state medalist for the first time in four years and won a Frontier League title for the first time in 19 years.

Louisburg took a lot of pride with what it accomplished, but the Wildcats are even more excited for the possibilities this season.

They return three state qualifiers and two state medalists from a season ago, and will boast another full varsity lineup this season that has hopes to contend for another league crown.

“No one should be putting pressure on themselves,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They should be excited about the potential for the season. That excitement should motivate them to work smarter and fight harder to break through to the next level.”

Seniors Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan, along with junior Thad Hendrix, will lead the Wildcats for the upcoming season as all three are returning state qualifiers.

Koechner, who wrestled at 220 pounds and finished third at state last season, will make up the move up to the heavyweight class this year. The Louisburg senior racked up 44 wins a season ago and Bovaird believes he is primed for another run in the state tournament.

“Mason has been hitting the weights and packing on some more muscle since last season,” Bovaird said. “He’s up to a solid 270 right now and feels pretty comfortable at 285. I think

he's got the bulk and strength to hang with the best heavyweights in the state, and he's got the agility and experience to beat them."

Keegan is another returning state medalist for the Wildcats as he finished sixth at 120 pounds last year with a 30-13 mark. Thad Hendrix, who qualified for state at 113 pounds a season, will wrestle at 106 this season after Hunter Bindi – a state qualifier last season – transferred to a different school.

"Thad has experience and maturity working for him this year," Bovaird said. "Last year he found his stride, but was an underclassman giving up 6-8 pounds to his opponents. This year, he's an upperclassman fitting right into his weight class. He's more confident and he's stronger.

"Nathan is stronger than ever. He's already certified at 120, and making weight shouldn't be a concern. He's not cutting, so he can focus on taking his moves and making them even more deadly than they already are. For both guys, having a steady focus should help them improve even more on last season's successes."



**Junior Thad Hendrix will compete in the 106 pound spot for the Wildcats this season after qualifying for state at 113 pounds last season.**

Louisburg also returns an experienced wrestler who didn't even factor into the Wildcats' success a season ago. Ryan Adams, who qualified for state as a freshman, had to sit out his sophomore season with an arm injury.

Now a junior, Adams hopes to take a big step forward after he

was one win away from a state medal his freshman campaign. He will wrestle at 145 pounds for the Wildcats.

“Ryan is back in stride, almost like nothing happened last year,” Bovaird said. “He couldn’t wait to get back on the mat once his elbow healed. He did more off-season wrestling than anyone else on the team, and it definitely shows with his practice on the mat. It’s been a readjustment getting back into serious wrestling shape, but he’s got the strength to do it. I’m excited for him to have an awesome season.”

They may not have state experience, but the Wildcats return several wrestlers from the 2015-16 season with a lot of varsity mat time.

Going into the season, juniors Kyle Allen (126 pounds) and Tucker Batten (132) will provide some stability as will sophomores Blue Caplinger (160) and Austin Moore (170). Junior Alec Maler (138) along with seniors Dylan Meyer (152), Ben Hupp (182), Austin Raetzel (195) and Terry Allen (220) will also play big roles for the Wildcats.



**Senior Nathan Keegan hopes to build off his 30-win and sixth-place finish at state last season.**

“Up and down the line, we have some very strong wrestlers,” Bovaird said. “There are 2-3 weight classes where we’ve got some bubble groups as 132, 138 and 170 are pretty deep. Kyle will be a tough kid, as will Tucker Batten. Both of them have had substantial mat time at the varsity level the last two years. Blue and Austin both had winning records last year as freshmen, and both of them are a lot stronger this year. Ben and Garrett Caldwell both did some camps last summer and are ready to do some damage this season, too. Austin will be very strong at 195 – he’s intimidating to look at and he’s got the confidence of being a senior.

“Dylan is back with the program, and with his sheer strength, athleticism, and flexibility at 152, he’ll be looking forward

to a great season. Terry is stepping up at varsity at 220. He's been a very dependable member of the team the last three years, and I'm excited for him to have a shot at varsity now."

The Wildcats will also feature a new addition to their coaching staff as Brandon Ott has come on to serve as an assistant coach along with Andy Wright. Ott graduated from Ottawa High School in 2011 where he was a league champion and went on to wrestle for Ottawa University for two years.

"While losing good kids to graduation is always tough to deal with, it's so encouraging that here we are with a pretty solid line-up this year," Bovaird said. "We have had some depth in the past few years – good young kids getting invaluable varsity experience. The right things are happening for Louisburg wrestling. There's a working system that's bringing solid kids to the high school program. Our coaching staff is able to take them to the next level.

"Andy has been a head coach before and while at Wellsville, he was able to work with some great athletes. Brandon has been a part of a good young collegiate program, and his college wrestling experience is helping us hone our drill series even more. I spent a good part of the summer and fall researching new drills and techniques, watching videos, and talking with coaches of successful programs. I think we're in a good spot with Louisburg wrestling."

Louisburg will kickoff its season Thursday when it hosts Osawatomie for a dual. Matches are set to begin at 6 p.m., and it will also be an alumni reunion as all former Wildcats wrestlers have been invited to return to watch the current group.

The Wildcats will compete in their first tournament Saturday for the Fort Scott Dual Tournament.

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# Wildcat wrestlers put in work over summer



Members of the Louisburg wrestling team attended the Outdoor Challenge Camp earlier this month in Valentine, Neb. Those who attended are (from left) head coach Bobby Bovaird, Hunter Bindi, Brandon Doles, Jacob Felder, Garrett Caldwell, Mason Koechner, Kyle Allen, Hunter Millbern and Basehor-Linwood wrestler Aidan Baker.

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Getting better in any sport involves more than just practice during the season, it starts with putting in the work in the offseason and members of the Louisburg High School wrestling team had a busy summer.

To motivate them a little more, head coach Bobby Bovaird came up with a system. Wildcat wrestlers had opportunities to attend a number of camps, competitions or workouts in order to earn Ironman points

If the wrestlers, whether in high school, middle school or elementary, earned 100 points or more they were presented with the Ironman Award.

Junior Ryan Adams, who missed all of last year with an arm injury, used this summer to get back into shape and showed he

is ready for the season to start. Adams led the Wildcat team with 157 points and won the Titan Games in Missouri, going 4-0 against area wrestlers and was 11-1 at the Top City Wrestling League, which took place in Topeka in June.

Garrett Caldwell (151 points), Brandon Doles (138), Kyle Allen (106) and Hunter Bindi (100) also earned Ironman honors.

“My goal was to get some extrinsic motivation for the wrestlers – not just the high school wrestlers, but also the middle school and the youth wrestlers,” Bovaird said. “In all, we had 30 wrestlers from all levels doing something wrestling-based this summer. That kind of commitment is awesome – especially considering the number of wrestlers who are working summer jobs, getting ready for fall sports, or staying active with community, church, and school events. Plus, we’ve been getting a great number of youth wrestlers involved, which will make a smooth transition for them when they get to high school.”

For the third straight year, Bovaird also took several wrestlers to the Outdoor Challenge Camp in Valentine, Neb., earlier this month. Mason Koechner, Jacob Felder, Caldwell, Allen, Bindi, Hunter Millbern and Doles.

“We got some pretty good wrestling instruction, and it was awesome seeing everyone competing in the various outdoor challenges all week,” Bovaird said. “One of my favorite things was Garrett Caldwell getting the sportsmanship award at the end of camp because when the boys played in the river nerf football tournament, Garrett made sure that everyone on his team had a chance to catch the ball. Everyone at the camp was mixed up into different teams – kids from ages 10 to 18 – and Garrett really made sure to involve the younger kids on his team.

“I also loved seeing the guys compete on the military style obstacle course that is a big tradition with the Outdoor



Challenge Camp. Hunter Bindi had the fastest Louisburg time at 8:03, followed by Hunter Millbern with a time of 9:16. We did the course as a team and got a time of 5:43 (we got 7:23 as a team last summer). Garrett and Brandon were members of the overall camp champions. Their team won the river nerf football game, the dodgeball tournament, the team relay on the obstacle course, and the paintball tournament.”

Baldwin High School coach Kit Harris set up a number of summer wrestling clinics called DC Gold and Bovaird took his athletes there as well. Bovaird was also a clinician for a week at the camp, while Adams, Caldwell, Doles, Cade Holtzen, Collin Hamilton, Koechner and Thad Hendrix made the trip for at least a day to work on leg wrestling.

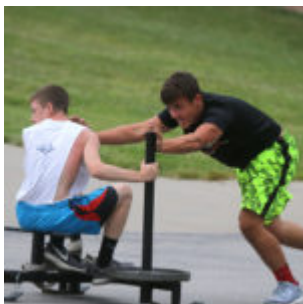
“Coach Harris and I both demonstrated techniques and then the boys wrestled live,” Bovaird said. “It was a mix of Baldwin and Louisburg kids. Seeing as Coach Harris was my high school coach and he got me into coaching while I was in college, it was pretty nice collaborating with him for a change, rather than competing against him.”

Senior Ben Hupp did some work as well as he spent a week at the Oklahoma State wrestling camp in Stillwater, Okla. Caldwell, Kyle Allen and Kaden Allen went to the Penn State camp at Baker University at the end of May, while senior Austin Raetzel attended some DC Gold clinics that specialized in throws.

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## **Wildcat wrestlers continue**

# busy summer with camp



Garrett Caldwell pushes teammate Thad Hendrix up the hill on a sled with weights during a strongman workout Thursday during the final day of the Louisburg High School wrestling team camp.

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Last season was a special run for the Louisburg High School wrestling team and it hopes to capitalize on that momentum.

The Wildcats won their first Frontier League crown in 19 years last year and ended up sending five wrestlers to the Class 4A state tournament. Louisburg also had two bring home state medals in Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan.

It was a season to remember. Now the Wildcats are back to work to try and make this coming season an even bigger one.

Louisburg hosted its team camp last week at the high school as head coach Bobby Bovaird conducted a beginners and advanced camp for four days.

“I think that a lot of the boys have been able to relax and enjoy the good feelings coming off of last season,” Bovaird said. “It really was a fun season. Several guys have chosen to distance themselves from wrestling this spring and summer, and I understand that. As long as they’re active and competitive in something, I’m happy with it. It’s good to take a break from time to time.”

“We have a bunch of guys who are involved in other sports, and I’m fully supportive of them focusing their efforts there. It’s summertime in Louisburg – traditionally that means football, morning weights, 7-on-7, and other activities. I’m not worried about losing focus for next season. It’s a strong group of athletes we have here in Louisburg.”

Although numbers were down for the team camp, the ones who did attended received a lot of instruction. However, Bovaird didn’t want to be the lone voice in the room and he brought in a couple of guest instructors in LHS graduate Zach Knox and former Fort Hays State wrestler Nathan Shipley.

“For the high school group, I wanted to give them exposure to some of my typical ‘favorites,’ but from alternate perspectives,” Bovaird said. “I asked two college wrestlers to come help out. Nathan Shipley wrestled for me back in Topeka at Washburn Rural High School and grew to have a lot of success as a varsity wrestler for FHSU. Zach just came off a pretty solid redshirt season at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina.

“I was really happy to see these two young men step up and show some great techniques. They reiterated lots of things I’ve said to the team, but they also brought a new perspective to these techniques.”

After spending the first three days on the mat, the advanced campers found themselves outdoors for a little training exercise. Bovaird called on friend Corey Scott, a personal trainer in the Kansas City area, to put his campers through a strongman workout.



**Brandon Doles lifts an atlas stone over the bar Thursday during the LHS wrestling team camp.**

The wrestlers worked for close to 90 minutes on flipping large tires, lifting atlas stones and other exercises. It was the second year in a row Scott has come down and Bovaird believes it is a nice change of pace.

“Corey and I go way back – he was a wrestling official in the Topeka area when I was in high school and I even coached his nephew at my previous school,” Bovaird said. “I love the ‘wrestler strong’ training program that he does. It lines up perfectly with what I want our wrestlers working on strength-wise, and it complements quite a lot of what Coach (Kyle) Littrell does with his football strength program. Corey is a passionate advocate for wrestling and he has this program that makes training a little more fun.”

Although the camp is complete, the Wildcats are still doing plenty of work in the offseason and Bovaird has tried to motivate his wrestlers by creating an ‘Ironman Program.’ Wrestlers can earn a certain number of points for attending open mats, camps or other wrestling activities over the

summer.

“I have five or six who are on track to hit 100 points, and every wrestler in the program who hits the 100-point mark will get his name on a t-shirt for the Ironman Award,” he said. “It’s a way to encourage off-season wrestling. There’s the obvious reason for wrestling outside of the high school season – it gets you to jump to a higher level of wrestling – but sometimes teenagers need a little more motivation: getting their name on a t-shirt. We’ve had anywhere from 9-12 kids at each open mat the last three weeks.”

Several Wildcats wrestlers have been busy this summer. Garrett Caldwell and Kyle Allen attended the Penn State wrestling camp at Baker University and learned from Penn State coach Cael Sanderson.

Junior Ryan Adams, who missed most of the season last year due to an injury, wrestles in Topeka on Wednesdays and competed in the Titan Games in Parkville, Mo., two weeks ago.

Senior Ben Hupp went to the Oklahoma State wrestling camp last week, while Mason Koechner, Hunter Bindi, Hunter Millbern, Jacob Felder Brandon Doles, Caldwell and Allen will be traveling with Bovaird to the Outdoor Challenge Camp in Valentine, Neb., next month.

It is that camp in which the Wildcats are trying to raise money. The team will be hosting a spaghetti feed at 5 p.m., on July 9 at First Baptist Church. The all-you-can-eat dinner is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.

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# Paola AD proposes bill to help classification issue



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

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

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

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

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

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

division.

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

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

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

Hines gave a 15 minute testimony in front of the committee and then answered questions from the committee members for more than 30 minutes afterward. Before the hearing, Hines received support from every member in the Frontier League, Pioneer League and all but two schools in the Kaw Valley League, as those two didn't respond before the hearing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here is what he found.

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



or more state titles than their public school peers.

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

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

“There is a whole bunch of schools in the Kansas City, Kansas school district that are 6A or 5A that have no business competing against those really hard schools,” Hines said. “They don’t have resources, they don’t have the students, there is no interest and they have all those things working against them and I feel bad for those kids. Who wants to trot out against some of those bigger schools and know you are going to get your ears boxed in? That is not fun. Moreover, it is not challenging for the kids those schools are playing against.”

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

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

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

with his FFA kids. People flock to success.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I don’t feel comfortable making that change because I feel a committee needs to do the work,” Hines said. “I shouldn’t be doing it, nor should 11 legislators, you need more. We should let the classification committee work on it and hopefully we

can get some things accomplished.

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

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## **Opinion: Wildcat wrestling experiences big turnaround**



The Louisburg High School wrestling team has become a family in the last four years as the program has grown from zero state qualifiers to five in each of the last two years. Hard work and a family atmosphere is a big reason for the Wildcats' success.

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In the last two years, the Louisburg wrestling team has had 10 state qualifiers, two state medalists and recently won its first Frontier League title in 19 years.

For some teams, those numbers may not seem like a big deal. However, where the Wildcat program was just three years ago – it is almost a minor miracle that these kinds of leaps can be made in that short of time.

It is something that only a “family” can accomplish.

Before Bobby Bovaird took over as the team's head coach for the 2011-12 season, the Wildcat team was in constant flux. Louisburg had four different coaches from 2007 to 2011 and it was hard for anyone to establish a program.

The Wildcats weren't without success as they had several state qualifiers during that time, including Austin Hood, who won three consecutive state titles. Bovaird came in on Hood's final run through the state tournament and even he admitted it was a good first season.

"The first year was a fun one because I really felt like I was along for the ride with Austin Hood's third state championship," Bovaird said. "The next two years were very humbling."

That they were.

During the 2013 and 2014 seasons, Louisburg was nowhere to be seen at the state tournament. Numbers were down in the program during those first two years and Bovaird was unable to field a full team for duals.

He realized he, and a lot of other people, had work to do.

"It's taken a lot of patience," Bovaird said. "Prior to the 2013 season, I'd never been a part of a team – as a coach or competitor – that failed to qualify a wrestler for state or that finished last in a tournament. The next year, 2014, we had some highlights, but when it came to regionals, we came home empty handed for the second straight year.

"Louisburg had never had back-to-back seasons with no qualifiers. After those two seasons, I was pretty frustrated, but at the same time I knew I had to be patient because there were good things happening at Louisburg."

It took a lot of work. Bovaird made sure he stayed involved with every level of wrestling from the kids club, to middle

school and the high school program.

Bovaird also wanted to make sure his team was seen throughout the community and make people care about the Wildcat program again.

“One main goal I had in taking over the program was to increase the visibility of the wrestling program with the community of Louisburg,” Bovaird said. “We needed to be seen as an organization, not just an alternative to basketball in the winter. I’m incredibly proud of what the team has accomplished.

“I’ve also made a point to invest myself into the program beyond the mat, like summer camps away from home, team-building opportunities outside of regular practice time, fundraising efforts in the community in the off-season and other things.”



**Assistant coaches (from left) Andy Wright, Robert Ebenstein, LHS grad Brenton Wrigley and head coach Bobby Bovaird eagerly wait for pin during the regional tournament. Wrigley was a state qualifier a year ago and traveled to Columbus to cheer on his old team.**

With the help of current assistants Robert Ebenstein and Andy Wright, and former ones in Aaron Ziadeh and Chad White, the personality of the Wildcat program is a different one.

It became obvious during the 2015 season as Louisburg was able to place high in some tournaments and field close to a full squad. Then, in the postseason, the Wildcats made their return to the state tournament for the first time in three years with five state qualifers.

The Wildcats didn't have the medals to show for it, but they would only have to wait one more year for those to come. Juniors Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan finished third and sixth, respectively, as Louisburg had five more wrestlers return to state in 2016.

Maybe no one personifies the growth of the team more than Anders Vance. The Louisburg senior was a part of those Wildcat teams his first two years that had to take some lumps and he took some hits right along with them.

As a freshman, the Wildcats didn't have a heavyweight so Vance was thrown right into the fire. He finished his first year with a 4-22 record.



**Anders Vance accomplished a lot during his four years with the Wildcat program. He started as a four-win wrestler as a freshman to a two-time state qualifier.**

“He stepped up and wrestled varsity when we had no other upper classmen to fill those weights, and he spent that year going

head-to-head with grown men,” Bovaird said.

Vance, like the team, got a little better his second season as he finished with 18 wins and just a few shy of a .500 record. Then, in his junior year, Vance took off.

He ended the year with a 27-9 record despite missing two tournaments with a concussion and eventually qualified for his first state tournament after winning a regional title.

Then came Vance’s senior year that saw him grow into 44 wins, a league champion and a two-time state qualifier. He has also been a team captain the last two years and has done what it takes to get better.

That hard work has given him the seventh-most wins in team history and has set the career record for team points with 566.

“Even though he didn’t reach the medal stand at state, he’s got so much to be proud of,” Bovaird said. “He’s been a regular fixture at our summer team camps and open mat workouts, and he made the trek to Nebraska for the Outdoor Challenge Camp two years ago.

“His success mirrors that of the team over the past five seasons. He took his lumps as a freshman, made big strides as a sophomore, and then really blossomed as a junior and senior. I’d say that’s how the team has grown over those years, too.”

Vance has been a part of a special senior class for Bovaird and one that has helped the team grow, not only on the mat, but behind the scenes.

Senior Chris Turner jumped from two wins a season ago to 21 victories this season on the varsity level, while senior Zach Jones doubled his wins from eight to 16 this season.

Fellow seniors Dillin Roberts and Bradley Trageser saw time in several varsity tournaments this year, but had to wrestle



unattached and also spent some time at the junior varsity level. Even though there were wrestlers ahead of them, both still wanted to help the team in any way they could.

“There’s an epidemic of egoism in sports these days; guys can’t handle the fact that it’s not about them, so they quit,” Bovaird said. ‘I’m not going to be the star,’ ‘so-and-so has the starting spot,’ ‘I can’t handle the pressure’ – all these egocentric excuses for why they quit their senior year. These six guys stuck it out. Dillin and Bradley both spent the year at junior varsity, but they also wrestled in many varsity meets and contributed to much of our success.”

Even though the journey has brought a lot of rewards, there was also some heartache along the way. The Wildcat wrestling family was rattled back in January 2015 when teammate Jimmy Dolan was involved in an automobile accident that left him with severe head trauma.

It was tough on a lot of people within the program, including Bovaird and Jimmy’s best friend – Zach Jones. While Jimmy was in the hospital, Zach would spend a lot of time in the hospital by his side.

The road to recovery was a long one for Jimmy, but he eventually made his way back to where he could return to school and also rejoined the Wildcat team this year. Although he couldn’t wrestle, Jimmy spent time helping the team in any way he could, that included supporting Zach.



**Jimmy Dolan records his teammate, and friend, Zach Jones' match during the regional tournament. Dolan could often be found alongside the mat cheering on his friend.**

Just like Zach did for Jimmy a year ago, Jimmy returned the favor as he could often be seen on the side of the mat during Zach's matches supporting him and videotaping his matches.

"Jimmy's story has been the toughest I've been a part of as a coach," Bovaird said. "Last year when he had his accident, he had been wrestling the best I'd ever seen him wrestle. He was on pace to be a state qualifier as a junior, and who knows what would have been possible as a senior.

"He's been by Zach Jones' side the whole season and is a very loyal friend. It could have been easier for him to just call it quits and step away from the sport, because it had to be so tough for him to be unable to ever wrestle again. But he stuck

it out. He did what he could to contribute to the program. He was Zach's biggest fan, his coach, and his friend, and he tried to impart his knowledge to the younger wrestlers and do what he could to motivate them."

This team is one big family and it is one of the main reasons for the tournament. The program has a different atmosphere around it even trickles down to the managers – especially seniors Paige Shaffer and Alyssa Ellifrits.

"They are like sisters," Bovaird said. "I'd recruited Paige as a freshman, and midway through the year Alyssa started helping out. Ever since, they've been outstanding managers. Keeping accurate stats, washing singlets and mopping the mats, helping with inventory, training younger managers and cheering on the boys. They even got to make the trip to state to see the season's successes reach their peak."



Jacob Felder, Ben Hupp, Nathan Keegan, Hunter Bindi and Thad Hendrix lay next to the mat to watch Mason Koechner's regional finals match. The Wildcat wrestlers have been supportive of each other all season.

As good as the last two years have been, Bovaird also realizes it comes to an end for what has been a special senior class in more ways than one.

“I had a hard time keeping stoic at league, with the excitement of winning our first league title in nearly 20 years, and I barely held back the tears at regionals and state,” Bovaird said. “When we have our season banquet, it’ll be tough saying goodbye to this group of seniors because they’re like family to all of us in the program.”

Those “family” members might be moving on, but the core of the Wildcat wrestling program is as solid as ever.

Koechner, Keegan, Hunter Bindi and Thad Hendrix will be returning state qualifiers and Louisburg will also get a state qualifier from 2015 back in Ryan Adams, who missed all this year with an injury. More qualifiers are sure to follow in 2017 and life in the program is healthier than ever.

“We’re losing a good group of seniors, and they’re going to be missed, but they did their part to add to the foundation of Louisburg,” Bovaird said. “When a season like this one ends, I can’t help but get excited for what’s left to come.”

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**Koechner, Keegan end state medal dry spell**



**Louisburg junior Mason Koechner puts Abilene's Sam Burt on his back during the third-place match Saturday during the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships at the Salina Bicentennial Center. Koechner finished the tournament with a third-place medal and a 5-1 record.**

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SALINA – It had been four years since anyone from the Louisburg High School wrestling team had walked away with any kind of hardware from the Class 4A state tournament.

That little mini-streak has now ended.

Louisburg juniors Mason Koechner and Nathan Keegan each found their way to the podium Saturday following the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

Koechner led the Wildcats as he finished third at 220 pounds and Keegan came in sixth at 120 pounds. Both wrestlers came back from tough quarterfinal losses Friday to rebound with a big day Saturday.

As for the rest of the team, freshman Hunter Bindi (106 pounds) was one victory away from a medal while senior Anders Vance (285) also won a match. Sophomore Thad Hendrix (113) finished the tournament 0-2.

Louisburg finished 14<sup>th</sup> in the team standings with 45 points.

“I think the boys all wrestled really well,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “They stepped up in the clutch matches and gave it everything they had. It’s been four years since we had a medalist, and it feels great to have that monkey off my back. Ultimately, the credit goes to the guys who get out there and wrestle, but the successes of all our kids have been built with the guidance of the kids wrestling club, the middle school program, and the high school staff.”



**Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird is all smiles after Mason Koechner clinched his third-place medal.**

Koechner (44-6) was among one of the favorites to reach the championship match at 220 and he got off to a good start Friday with a pin of Hays’ Trey VanPelt. Then in the quarterfinals, Koechner found himself in a tough match with El

Dorado's Cameron Hunt.

The match was tied at 1-all late in the third period, but Hunt shot in on Koechner to take him down and get two back points to earn the 5-1 decision.

"You can't overlook any opponent at state," Koechner said. "I lost by a couple points on Friday and then coming in Saturday I knew that I hated that feeling and I didn't want to feel it again. I knew what I was capable of and put it all together and it worked for me."

It certainly did as Koechner came back with a vengeance on Saturday. The Louisburg junior racked up four straight victories with three coming by pin and another by major decision to earn a third-place medal.

Koechner started Saturday with a pin of Santa Fe Trail's Gabe Forrestt and then set up a consolation quarterfinal match with Ottawa's Brent Hornbuckle for the opportunity to earn a state medal. It didn't take long for Koechner to secure his medal as he pinned Hornbuckle in just 1 minute and 32 seconds.

That set up a rematch with Paola's Jake Miller in the consolation semifinals. Miller defeated Koechner by a close decision in the regional finals a week earlier, but this rematch wasn't even close. Koechner dominated the match as he won by a 10-0 major decision.

"I didn't have my best week at regionals, but this time I was wrestling well and wasn't going to let anyone stop me, including him," Koechner said.

In the third-place match against Abilene's Sam Burt, Koechner trailed 1-0 in the third period. As he was trying to get an escape, he hit the mat and rolled onto the top of Burt for a pin and got his fourth win of the day.

"It is awesome," Koechner said. "Working all season long, and

practice isn't always the best, no one likes practice, but it is all worth it coming out here and medaling."

His coach couldn't agree more.

"He had an outstanding tournament," Bovaird said of Koechner. "I can't help but wonder if the quarterfinals match was weighing on him Friday afternoon. It's a huge match – if you win, you are guaranteed a state medal, and if you lose, you have a long road through the back side of the bracket. It's nearly impossible not to look beyond that one match. The way Mason came back and notched two pins to get into the medal rounds, then to get a revenge win against Paola, and to cap it off with a pin for third place was so exciting to be a part of."





**Louisburg junior Nathan Keegan lifts Independence's Jeremiah Lawrie during their 120-pound consolation quarterfinal match Saturday in Salina.**

Keegan (30-13) had a similar experience Saturday as he needed two wins to secure his first state medal. He opened the tournament Friday with a pin of Baldwin's T.J. Hopper and advanced to the quarterfinals against Pratt's Brayan Balderrama.

Balderrama, who ended up finishing third, defeated Keegan by a 10-3 decision and the Louisburg junior had to move to the back side of the bracket on Saturday.

He started off well with a pin of Fort Scott's Kyle Montojo and then moved to the consolation quarterfinals against Independence senior Jeremiah Lawrie with a chance to medal. Keegan and Lawrie squared off in the regional finals the week before and Keegan won a 1-0 decision.

With so much at stake, Keegan rose to the occasion as he defeated Lawrie by a 5-2 decision and wrestled one of his better matches of the weekend to earn a state medal.

"I knew he was going to come out with everything he had and I just couldn't let up," Keegan said. "Overall, I felt that this was one of my better weekends and that is what it is supposed to be because it is state. I wrestled way better than I usually do, and a couple matches I could have done better, but it was still good."

Keegan fell to Burlington's Brett Bober in a 2-0 decision in the consolation semifinals and then lost a 7-1 decision to Tonganoxie's Korbin Riedel in the fifth-place match to garner a sixth-place medal.

"It means a lot," Keegan said of the medal. "This is what I have been working for all season. Once I got that win in the consolation round to medal, that was one of the greatest feelings that I have had in a long time."



**Freshman Hunter Bindi works for pin of Abilene's Tanner McGivney during the 106-pound consolation quarterfinal Saturday.**

With all the joy of getting two state medals, the Wildcat team also suffered some heartbreak.

Bindi (40-9), who went 1-1 on Friday, moved to the consolation bracket Saturday and pinned Independence's Gabe Eades to advance to the consolation quarterfinals and was one win away from a medal.

He was well on his way to getting it as he held a 7-1 decision in the second period over Abilene's Tanner McGivney, but McGivney locked Bindi up in a spladle and earned the quick pin to end Bindi's season just short of a medal.

"Hunter's loss left me feeling sick to my stomach," Bovaird said. "I know he's a freshman and he's got three more years, but he came so close. He definitely showed up to wrestle that match, building a lead before being caught. It's one of those moves where when you see it happen, you just can't believe it actually worked. In a split second, everything backfired for

Hunter, all because he made one misjudgment in position and his opponent saw an opening for a “funkt” move that you don’t see too often.

“I told Hunter to remember the feeling that this loss left in him; let this loss be the fire that drives him to win three state championships. Despite the heartbreaking end of his season, I’m still very proud of all he did this year.”

The end also came for Vance, a senior, who found himself in one of the more competitive brackets of the state tournament.



**Louisburg senior Anders Vance lifts the leg of Towanda**

## **Circle's Austin King as he prepares for a takedown during Friday's first round match in Salina.**

Vance opened with a revenge win Friday against Towanda-Circle's Austin King. Vance, who lost by decision to King in the state tournament a year ago, came through with a second period pin. Before that, King had lost just one match all season.

It became more difficult in the quarterfinals as Vance went up against Chapman's Jason Zook, the eventual state champion and was pinned. The loss moved Vance to the consolation bracket against McPherson's Ty Goss.

Goss scored a takedown early and then rode out Vance the rest of the time for a 2-0 decision, which ended Vance's season with a 44-10 record.

"Anders' last match still bugs me," Bovaird said. "His opponent essentially spent nearly four minutes laying on top of Anders, not working any offense. The officials needed to take control of that match. Anders tried his best to get out from under his opponent, and the officials allowed the other kid to get away with little to no offense that entire time. It's very frustrating. Anders racked up 44 wins this season and for the past two years he's been one of the leaders of this program. He deserved a state medal."



**Sophomore Thad Hendrix tries to block a shot of an opponent Friday during a 113-pound match.**

Hendrix's stay at the state tournament was a short one as he faced Pratt's Dylan Pelland, the eventual state champion, in the first round and was pinned in under a minute. Hendrix (16-22) later lost a 7-1 decision to Jefferson West's Austin Michaelis in the first round of consolation.

The Wildcats also wrote some new entries in the record book as both Koechner and Vance tied the school record with the most wins in a season with 44.

Here are some other accomplishments from the weekend.

- 14th place is the seventh highest finish in team

history; the Wildcats' 45 points is tied with the second most team points scored at the state tournament

- This is the seventh time Louisburg has had two state placers in the same year
- Koechner set the school pin record with 37.
- Hunter Bindi is the first freshman in school history to hit 40 wins in a season.
- Vance moved into seventh place in all-time wins with 93; Koechner moved into eighth place with 91 wins; Nathan Keegan is in 19th place with 64 wins.