

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.

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

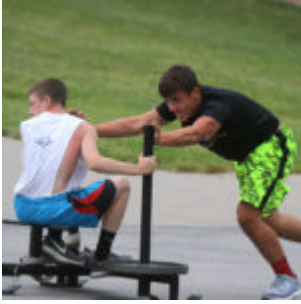
got 7:23 as a team last summer). Garrett and Brandon were members of the overall camp champions. Their team won the river nerf football game, the dodgeball tournament, the team relay on the obstacle course, and the paintball tournament.”

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.

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.

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.

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.”

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.

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.”

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.

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 14th 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 “funk” 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.

Wildcats hope to end state medal drought



Louisburg senior Anders Vance is one of five state qualifiers for the Wildcat wrestling team. The five Wildcats will begin their quest for a state medal tomorrow morning at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

It has been four years since anyone from the Louisburg wrestling team has returned from the state tournament with a medal.

The Wildcats are not only hoping to break that skid this weekend at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships in Salina, but they are betting on bringing home more than just one. It would be the first state medal since Austin Hood's state championship in 2012.

"Several of our weight classes could work out pretty well for us," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "There has been a feeling of excitement in the practice room. It's not over-confidence or cockiness; it's excitement about what we could accomplish. KSHSAA (Kansas State High School Activities Association) does a random assignment when it comes to building the state brackets, and there's a formula that they apply once all the regional results are in. In several of our brackets, I really like how they panned out. I don't want to jinx us, but it's going to be an exciting weekend."

There is a lot of excitement among the five Wildcat state qualifiers, which includes junior Mason Koechner (39-5), who is currently ranked No. 2 in Class 4A at 220 pounds.

Louisburg also has plenty of chances for a medal. Freshman Hunter Bindi (38-7) won the 106-pound regional last week in Columbus and has emerged as a favorite to stand on the medal podium in his first year at the high school level.



Hunter Bindi – 106 pound bracket

Junior Nathan Keegan (27-10) finished runner-up at the regional tournament at 120 pounds, while senior Anders Vance (43-8) came in third at 285 after recording three pins. Sophomore Thad Hendrix (16-20) will make his first appearance at state at 113 pounds.

Bovaird, along with assistant coaches Robert Ebenstein and Andy Wright, and a few varsity wrestlers, have been working with the five state qualifiers all week trying to prepare them for what lies ahead.

“Our guys are pretty excited for this weekend,” Bovaird said. “We’ve got the potential to bring home some medals. You never know what’s going to happen at state, but I’ve got a good feeling about this group. Coach Ebenstein, Coach Wright, and I have been floating around the room quite a bit working specifically with our qualifiers on strategies and game plans to win matches.



Thad Hendrix – 113-pound bracket

“At this point in the year, if you want to win a match at state, you’ve got to score points. We need to remind these kids that they need to focus on doing what they know how to do to score points. Sometimes kids forget the simple things like that; they focus on things beyond their control. Our job as coaches is to remind them of what has worked for them all year

and to make sure they know how to get out there on the mat and make it happen.”

Bindi will open the tournament against Colby’s Kurt Schroeder (23-18), and should he advance, he will face off with one of two sophomores in Jefferson West’s Shane Kelly (26-13) or El Dorado’s Payton Sadowski (22-6)

“I am excited about it,” Bindi said. “Winning regional allowed me to get a good seed at state. My goal is to be one of the top two kids in the state, so we will see what happens.”



Nathan Keegan – 120 pound bracket

As for Hendrix, since he placed fourth at regionals, will meet a champion from a different regional in the first round. Hendrix will square off with Pratt junior Dylan Pelland (29-3) to open the tournament.

“I am looking forward to it and showing people what I can do,” Hendrix said. “I know this will be my first time going, but I am going to do my best and see what happens.”



Mason Koechner – 220 pound bracket

Keegan is making his second consecutive trip to the state tournament, along with Koechner and Vance. Keegan, who will face a familiar foe in Baldwin sophomore T.J. Hopper (24-17) in the first round, is ready for a quest at a state medal.

Keegan would face either Pratt's Brayan Balderramma (33-7) or McPherson's Cole Kretzer (24-15) in the quarterfinals if he advanced.

"I think going to state last year will help me this time around because I know what to expect a little more," Keegan said. "I am excited about it and hopefully I can go down there and get a medal."

Koechner has served as the Wildcats' top-ranked wrestler most of the season as he has climbed the ranking at 220 pounds slowly throughout the season. He will get his state tournament going against Hays' Trey VanPelt (26-18) and would meet El Dorado's Cameron Hunt (32-7) or De Soto's Lawson Marshall (16-17) in the quarterfinals if he advances.



"I think last year I was just happy to go to state for the first time, but this year I am ready to go win some matches," Koechner said. "My goal is to at least get in the top four if not better. I am looking forward to it."

Vance fell to King last year at the state tournament by a 4-0 decision but is ready to show others he is capable of making a run.

The action begins at 10 a.m. Friday at the Salina Bicentennial Center and will continue into Saturday.

Wildcats send five to state; Bindi wins title



The Louisburg High School wrestling team qualified five for the state tournament Saturday at Columbus High School. The state qualifiers (from left) are Thad Hendrix, Mason Koechner, Nathan Keegan, Hunter Bindi and Anders Vance.

COLUMBUS – “Win or go home” was the prevalent motto going around the Class 4A regional tournament at Columbus High School.

Louisburg didn’t want to see its season come to an end, so it did a lot of winning instead.

The Wildcats qualified five wrestlers for the state tournament following Saturday’s regional and they also had three place in the top two.

Freshman Hunter Bindi (106 pounds), junior Nathan Keegan (120) and junior Mason Koechner (220) each advanced to the regional finals match Friday and secured their spots early. Bindi went on to win a regional crown, while Keegan and Koechner each came in runner-up.

Senior Anders Vance (285) and sophomore Thad Hendrix (113) each had to do some work in the back side of their brackets, but finished third and fourth, respectively. All five wrestlers will make the trip to Salina on Friday for the Class 4A state tournament.

In all, the Wildcats had six wrestlers reach the 'blood round,' which determines who will make the state tournament in the back side of the bracket. Louisburg finished sixth in the team standings with 111.5 points.

"We were hoping for more (qualifiers), but we had some tough match-ups in the blood round," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "It's definitely a good step for us. I loved the feeling Friday night of having three guys in the finals, and I really liked our chances on the backside with several guys. We finished sixth as a team this year with 111.5 points, but we were fourth last year with 106 points. That's more points being scored this year, which definitely says something about our growth.

"I'm really proud that we were only seven points out of third place. We had lots of first-round byes, which would have been possible team points we could have scored. If a couple things had been different, brackets drawn differently, it could have made the difference. Regardless, we did pretty well with an outstanding group of guys, and I'm nothing but proud of how we wrestled this weekend."



Hunter Bindi won the 106-pound regional title following a 14-11 decision Saturday in Columbus.

It marks the second year in a row for Vance, Koechner and Keegan to earn a trip to state, while Bindi and Hendrix will go for the first time. The Wildcats also matched the number of state qualifiers from a year ago.

“We did pretty good,” Vance said. “We got six guys to the blood round, which is the most we have gotten in a long time. I am excited about who we were able to qualify, but I wish we could have gotten more. Guys wrestled as hard as they could, but that doesn’t always mean that it works out like you hope it does.”

The youngest Wildcat wrestler provided the team with the most success as Bindi worked his way through the 106-pound bracket to win a regional title as a freshman.

Bindi (38-7) pinned Labette County's Joe Hobbs in 47 seconds in the quarterfinals and then defeated Independence's Gabe Eades by a 14-0 major decision in the semifinals. He faced off with Fort Scott's Tyler Gorman in the finals and outlasted Gorman for a high-scoring 14-11 decision.

"It is exciting," Bindi said of the regional title. "I thought I wrestled pretty sloppy and my feet were glued to the mat at times. He probably shouldn't have taken me down that many times, but it turned out ok. Now I can get a good seed at state."

Koechner's finals match at 220 pounds turned out to be against a familiar opponent. The Louisburg junior, who is ranked No. 2 in the state, faced No. 3 Jake Miller from Paola and the two had split the two previous meetings.



Louisburg junior Mason Koechner battles Paola's Jake Miller during the 220-pound regional finals match Saturday. Koechner finished second overall.

Miller got the best of Koechner (39-5) this time around as he lost a 3-0 decision. It was a scoreless match into the third period until Miller got a point for an escape. With time ticking away, Koechner shot in on Miller, but Miller got a takedown in the final seconds.

"We are both state-ranked opponents and earlier in the year he got me by a couple points, then at league I got it together and I pinned him," Koechner said. "It was really frustrating for me to have him beat me by a couple points again, when I know I am capable of winning the match. He is a tough opponent and I just didn't wrestle my best."

It was a unique regional for Koechner, who didn't have to wrestle a match until the semifinals. It was there he met Chanute's Gage Clark, who is also ranked No. 5 in the state.

In his first match of the tournament, Koechner went to overtime with Clark, but earned the pin in the extra period.

"Mason's bracket got a little messed up when a non-seeded kid scratched before the start of the tournament," Bovaird said. "According to KSHSAA rules, if a non-seeded wrestler scratches, they don't redraw the bracket. Mason ended up getting two byes into the semifinals while his opponent had two matches to get warmed up for that match. It was a tough kid, and it was also the same kid that Mason beat last year in the blood round to go to state, so there was more at stake than just the match itself."

Like Koechner, Keegan also had an exciting semifinal match to earn a spot in the finals.



Junior Nathan Keegan made his way to the regional title match at 120 pounds Saturday and finished runner-up to qualify for state.

After pinning Chanute's Brent See in the quarterfinals, Keegan (27-10) went up against Independence's Jeremiah Lawrie and literally held on for a 1-0 decision. After Keegan earned an escape earlier in the match, he held Lawrie to the mat and rode him out for the final seconds.

"I saw there was eight seconds left on the clock and I did not want to go into overtime," Keegan said. "So I just ran and held him down as long as I could."

Keegan met Burlington's Brett Bober in the finals match at 120 pounds, but came up short in a 6-2 decision.

"Nathan has been more focused these last two weeks than I've ever seen him," Bovaird said. "I am really excited for what he

can do at state this week. That semifinal win showed he can ride a kid out, and it showed that he's limber and agile on his feet. Those skills are key for winning matches at state and hopefully winning a state medal."

As for Vance (43-8), he faced a tough bracket of his own as he had two state ranked opponents in his path to win another regional title. After winning a year ago, Vance came up short in his semifinals match against Independence's Seth Stroble, who is ranked No. 4 in the state.



Senior Anders Vance takes down his opponent during his 'blood round' match Saturday in Columbus. Vance finished third overall at 285 pounds.

Stroble caught Vance with a tight overhook on his elbow and eventually pinned Vance in the second period.

"He caught me off-guard with a different move and I wasn't expecting it," Vance said. "I thought if that wouldn't have

happened then the match would have gone a little differently.”

Other than that loss, Vance had a strong tournament. The Lousiburg senior picked up three wins, all by pin.

In his blood round match, Vance pinned Burlington’s T.J. Lang in 51 seconds and then pinned Iola’s Colton Toney in 29 seconds in the third-place match.

“He bounced back with a vengeance with those two pins,” Bovaird said.

As for Hendrix (16-20), he spent all night Friday and Saturday morning thinking about his match in the blood round. After his loss Friday, he went right to the blood round after receiving a bye.

It didn’t seem to affect him too much as he pinned Fort Scott’s Daevin Caldwell in 38 seconds to qualify for state.



Sophomore Thad Hendrix pins Fort Scott’s Daevin Caldwell on Saturday in Columbus. With the win, Hendrix earned a bid to

state.

"This is great," Hendrix said. "I was really, really nervous (Friday) night and (Saturday) morning because I knew that match would be an important one for me. I was glad I was able to go out and show everyone what I could do."

Hendrix was later pinned in his third place match, but Bovaird liked what he saw out of his sophomore.

"Thad qualifying for state was awesome," Bovaird said. "He was in the right place at the right time with his weight class. Consider the fact that Thad naturally weighs less than Hunter Bindi, and he's giving up tons of weight every match. He's competing with stronger kids and when it came down to it, he had to win one key match against the No. 4 seed. Thad was incredibly focused and went after it. He wanted that win badly, and he definitely gave it everything he's got."

As much as the joy as the Wildcats had following the tournament, they also knew they had to say goodbye to some of their wrestlers as their season came to end – including two seniors.

Chris Turner and Zach Jones wrestled their final matches for Louisburg. Turner, who wrestles at 138 pounds, was pinned in the third round of consolation and Jones lost a 7-0 decision in the blood round.

"The blood round is always hard for me as a coach," Bovaird said. "It's one of my favorite rounds of wrestling all year, but it also hurts the most. This year, I had two seniors see their seasons ended early. Chris got caught on his back in the consolation quarterfinals and with less than a second left in the first period, the ref called the pin. There's nothing you can do about it, but Chris knew it wasn't a pin, and I had a clear view to see that his back was up. It's just one of those times when a referee makes a call that leaves everyone shaking

their heads.

“It’s tough for a senior to lose his last match, but even more so when it’s a kid who’s improved so much like Chris has done and when it’s a questionable call like that. Zach Jones went 3-2 this weekend. He left it all on the mat, that’s for sure. I saw some excitement in his eyes after those wins and I was so proud of him. He just ran into a tough kid and couldn’t score the points he needed to score to win.”

Freshman Austin Moore (160) won a pair of matches, while sophomore Kyle Allen (126) and junior Ben Hupp (170) also won a match.

Wildcats win first league title in 19 years



The Louisburg wrestling team gathers around the Frontier League championship trophy following Saturday’s league title victory at Spring Hill High School. It was the Wildcats’ first league title in 19 years.

SPRING HILL – The last time Louisburg won a Frontier League

wrestling title, none of the current Wildcat wrestlers were even born yet.

It has been nearly two decades since the Wildcats were last crowned league champions. Louisburg can't say that anymore.

For the first time in 19 years, Louisburg captured the Frontier League crown with a 6-0 dual record over the two-day tournament that ended Saturday at Spring Hill High School.

"It is awesome. It just shows how much the team has grown and how much better we have gotten," senior Anders Vance said. "It was great to see how everyone stepped up because every point matters. Not getting pinned is a big deal and trying to get pins is a big deal too."

It has been a gradual process for the Wildcats, who under head coach Bobby Bovaird, have made strides in the league standings. Bovaird, who is in his fifth year, remembered how tough it was to field a full team, much less contend for a title.



Senior Chris Turner works for a pin during a 138-pound match Saturday in Spring Hill.

"My first year at Louisburg we took seven wrestlers to compete

in a dual tournament,” Bovaird said. “Statistically speaking, we were supposed to take last. Our numbers worked out just right against Eudora that we had several double forfeits and we matched up just right with them head-to-head, and we were able to win one dual. We took sixth as a team that year. Last year, we had a chance to take second, but dropped a tough one to Paola. This year was our year to come through on top.”

The Wildcats did come out on top, and it wasn’t even close.

Louisburg breezed through the rest of the league with a full roster. The Wildcats routed Eudora (66-13) and De Soto (69-10) on the first day and then returned Saturday with victories over Baldwin (56-18), Spring Hill (49-21), Paola (78-6) and Ottawa (39-25).

The Wildcats’ six victories was also noteworthy as they now have a 17-3 dual record on the season, which is the most dual wins in program history.

“It is awesome after 19 years to finally get a win here at league,” junior Mason Koechner said. “We have been working hard all year and we have really come together this year as a team.



Junior Nathan Keegan finished as a league champion at 120 pounds

"We had guys from every grade level come out here and win matches for us to win this title. There is a lot of good competition here in the Frontier League."

The dominance continued individually as well. Louisburg finished the tournament with four league champions and the Wildcats had a wrestler finish in the top four of every weight class.

Freshman Hunter Bindi (106 pounds), junior Nathan Keegan (120), Koechner (220) and Vance (285) all ended the day as league champions.

Senior Chris Turner (138), freshman Blue Caplinger (145) and freshman Austin Moore (160) finished as league runner-up. Sophomore Kyle Allen (126), senior Zach Jones (152), senior Dillin Roberts (170) and junior Austin Raetzel (195) took third, while sophomore Thad Hendrix (113), sophomore Tucker Batten (132) and junior Jacob Felder (182) took fourth.



Luisburg High School wrestling team poses with their Frontier League Championship trophy following Saturday's tournament at Spring Hill High

However, the tournament wasn't without some adversity. Before it even started, junior Ben Hupp, who normally wrestles at 170 pounds, was out sick with the flu and Bovaird called on Roberts to fill his spot from the junior varsity roster.

Also, Lyndon Smith was unavailable at 195 pounds due to a prior obligation and Bovaird put Raetzel in to fill his spot. It all turned out OK as both wrestlers provided the team with big wins.

"We wrestled tough," Bovaird said. "Ben got hit with the flu Friday morning so I called Dillin at the last minute to

come weigh in and wrestle up a weight. Lyndon had a prior obligation so Austin stepped up and gave up 13 pounds to fill that gap. Both Roberts and Raetzel were 4-2 and took 3rd in their respective weight classes.



Mason Koechner pins his opponent from Spring Hill on Saturday.

"I'm especially proud of the unity, the teamwork, the enthusiasm, and the confidence our guys wrestled with this weekend, and I'm excited for next weekend. The assistant coaches (Robert Ebenstein and Andy Wright) have been doing a phenomenal job helping plan and run practice, and we're going to be working more in-depth with individuals to help them peak the right way."

Vance took a big step forward in the heavyweight class as he avenged a loss from earlier in the season to Spring Hill's Sam Christy. Vance, who had two quick pins earlier Saturday, faced off with Christy and won a 3-2 decision to win the league crown

Koechner also made up for a loss earlier in the season. The Louisburg junior, who is ranked No. 4 in Class 4A, met Paola's Jake Miller, the No. 3-ranked wrestler.

Koechner lost a 3-2 decision to Miller in the first tournament

of the season in December, but responded with a pin of Miller in the second period and followed that up with a 1-0 decision over Ottawa's Brent Hornbuckle in his final match.



Hunter Bindi had two pins during the league tournament, including this one against Spring Hill.

As for Bindi and Keegan, they had a little easier path. Bindi wrestled in two matches and won both by pin. Keegan went 4-0 over the tournament as he picked up three first period pins and a 5-0 decision over Baldwin's Ricky Norval.

"I would have liked to see Hunter and Nathan get more competition, but all-in-all, they wrestled well and scored the points we needed them to score," Bovaird said. "Both of them are sitting in good positions for their regional brackets. Anders' win over Christy was a nice revenge win, and when he came off the mat he had a surge of confidence because he figured out a key element in his wrestling technique and was able to successfully apply it against a tough opponent.



Louisburg senior Anders Vance picks up Spring Hill's Sam Christy by the leg for a takedown Saturday.

"Mason's win was also a revenge win. He just dominated kids on top this weekend, the Miller match included. Anders' win was a lot about pride and confidence, and it may have significance with regional seeding, but Mason's definitely helps him at regionals with his seeding."

Louisburg will now use this week to prepare for its most important tournament of the season. The Wildcats will travel to Columbus to compete in the regional tournament beginning Friday.

The top four in each weight class will qualify for state and the Wildcats hope they can send even more than their five qualifiers from a year ago.

"It's a fun time of the year, especially if the kids have the right mindset," Bovaird said. "With our varsity group, I think that everyone really pulled together in pursuit of the team title. I think that magic is still with us, and we're ready to peak at regionals and state. Too often, teams hit this point in the season and kids are ready for it to be over. With a

surge like the one we got at league, I think we're ready to make an impact at regionals."



Hunter Bindi,
106, Champion



Thad Hendrix,
113, 4th



Nathan Keegan,
120, Champion



Kyle Allen, 126,
3rd



Tucker Batten,
132, 4th



Chris Turner,
138, 2nd



Blue Caplinger,
145, second



Zach Jones, 152,
3rd



Austin Moore,
160, second



Dillin Roberts,
170, third



Jacob Felder,
182, fourth



Austin Raetzel,
195, 3rd



Mason Koechner,
220, Champion



Anders Vance,
285, Champion

RESULTS AND NOTES FROM LEAGUE TOURNEY

- 106 – Hunter Bindi, 6-0, 2 pins, CHAMPION
- 113 – Thad Hendrix, 3-3, 4th place
- 120 – Nathan Keegan, 6-0, 3 pins, CHAMPION
- 126 – Kyle Allen, 4-2, 1 pin, 3rd place
- 132 – Tucker Batten, 3-3, 2 pins, 4th place
- 138 – Chris Turner, 5-1, 3 pins, 2nd place
- 145 – Blue Caplinger, 5-1, 2 pins, 2nd place
- 152 – Zach Jones, 3-3, 2 pins, 3rd place
- 160 – Austin Moore, 5-1, 3 pins, 1 tech fall, 2nd place
- 170 – Dillin Roberts, 4-2, 3 pins, 3rd place
- 182 – Jacob Felder, 3-3, 4th place
- 195 – Austin Raetzel, 4-2, 2 pins, 3rd place
- 220 – Mason Koechner, 6-0, 4 pins, CHAMPION

285 – Anders Vance, 6-0, 2 pins, CHAMPION

- Anders Vance moves into 7th on the all-time career wins with 88 wins
 - Mason Koechner moves into 11th on all-time career wins with 84 wins
 - Vance has 40 season wins, which ties Austin Hood with the most season wins
 - Koechner has 32 pins this season, 1 shy of the team record he set last season
 - Hunter Bindi joins the 30-win club with a record of 35-7 heading into regionals
 - 10 Wildcats currently have winning records: Bindi, Nathan Keegan, Blue Caplinger, Austin Moore, Dillin Roberts, Jacob Felder, Austin Moore, Lyndon Smith, Koechner, and Vance
-

Wildcat wrestlers rally for win in front of alumni



Louisburg junior Lyndon Smith works for a pin as he puts his opponent on his back during the 195-pound match Wednesday against Lawrence High School. The Wildcats won the dual 42-35 and did so in front of several alumni.

As wrestlers from Wildcat past looked on during Wednesday's dual against Lawrence, they were treated to a good showing from the current Louisburg wrestling team.

After approximately 25 LHS wrestling alumni were honored halfway through the varsity dual, the current Wildcats wanted to make sure to leave a lasting memory for those in attendance. Louisburg did that as it rallied from 14 points down to defeat Lawrence 42-35 in its final home appearance of the season.

The Wildcats got a strong performance from their upper weights as they won four of the last five matches to get the win. The victory also boosts Louisburg's dual record to 11-3 on the season.

"I'm pretty happy with that," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "I love how the team is starting to figure things out when it comes to dual competitions. I'm also especially happy with the fact that we were able to put together a solid performance in front of the alumni. I wanted our team to be able to show them that Louisburg wrestling is as tough as ever."

Louisburg certainly did that as it got some crucial pins when it needed it the most. Lawrence had two open weights to start the dual, which gave Louisburg an early 12-point lead, but the Lions went on to win five consecutive matches and took a 26-12 advantage.

Wildcat senior Zach Jones stopped the bleeding at 152 pounds as he won by pin to cut the deficit to eight points. Lawrence won by decision at 160 pounds to push the lead back to 11, but the Wildcats responded in a big way.

At 170 pounds, junior Ben Hupp rallied to win by pin in the second period and cut the Lawrence lead to five. They were six big points for Louisburg as Lawrence would win by pin at 182 pounds and it allowed the Wildcats to remain close going into the final three matches.

Junior Lyndon Smith came through for Louisburg as he won by pin at 195 pounds and again cut the Lion lead to five.

“Those were two key wins for us,” Bovaird said of Hupp and Smith. “Ben was a little thrown off by the fact that his opponent was visually impaired. He’d never wrestled a kid with visual impairment before, so the rule requiring him to make contact at all times made him have to adjust his style at the last minute.

“Lyndon did great. He didn’t let the pressure get to him and he just went out and did his thing.”

Fellow junior Mason Koechner gave the Wildcats the lead for good as he won by pin at 220 points, and since Lawrence was open at the heavyweight spot, Koechner sealed the win for Louisburg.

It was perfect ending for the Wildcats as they saw several familiar faces return to watch the program. Following the 145-pound match, Bovaird had the alumni come onto the mat to be recognized in front of the home crowd, including the program’s first head coach – Don Meek.



The LHS wrestling



Alumni (from left) are Dan



From left: Tom

program's first head coach, Don Meek, steps forward to be recognized in front of the crowd Wednesday at LHS.

Cook, Duane
Scott, Dereck
Kerr, Sonny Ewalt
Sr., Jamie
Watrous

Dozier, Tom York,
Don Meek, Matthew
Golladay



From left; Greg Hink, Mike Hink, Rick Elliott, Kerry Anglin, Kaelee Allen, Chris Kelly



From left: Jimmy Allen, John Martin, Bruce Caldwell, Fletch Kelly, Brenton Wrigley, Shea Cox

Those who returned for the event were Don Meek, coach and founder; Dee Graham, coach; Rodney Kasitz, coach; Sonny Ewalt Sr., wrestler and coach, 1971; Duane Scott, wrestler, 1972; Pat York, cheerleader, 1972; Tom York, wrestler and coach, 1973; Fletch Kelly, wrestler, 1975; Dan Cook, wrestler, 1977; Chris Kelly, state qualifier, 1979; Rick Elliott, wrestler, 1982; Tom Dozier, state finalist, 1985; Jimmy Allen, wrestler, 1990; Bruce Caldwell, wrestler, 1990; Mike Hink, 3-time state qualifier, 1990; John Martin, wrestler, 1990; Matt Golladay, wrestler, 1993; Kerry Anglin, wrestler, 1994; Jamie Watrous, manager, 1997; Shawn Crossley, 3-time state qualifier, 1998; Dereck Kerr, 4-time state qualifier, 2000; Brock Elliott, wrestler, 2010; Kaelee Allen, wrestler, 2014; Shea Cox, wrestler, 2015 and Brenton Wrigley, state qualifier, 2015.

Bovaird was happy with the turnout and he is hoping for even bigger showings in the future.

“I didn’t get confirmation about the Lawrence dual until the middle of January, and that only gave me three weeks to get the word out,” Bovaird said. “Almost all the alumni who made it out are from the Louisburg area, but I’ve heard from alumni all over and they wished they could make it. Mark Eggleston lives in Ireland, Terry Scott lives in Nebraska, and David Dysart lives in Arizona, and those are just three of the guys I heard from.

“We had lots of wrestlers, four former coaches, managers and cheerleaders who were so excited to be there. Plus, lots of them brought their families, many of whom were LHS alumni. Next year, we know for sure that we have two home duals, so the plan is to get this organized better and get it on the calendar so we can draw in some folks from further away. I’d like to keep this a tradition for many years to come. This is the 47th year of LHS wrestling, and I’d like to build up to a big event for the 50th anniversary in a few years.”

Although he is excited for what future events can hold, Bovaird is still focused on this season as the postseason nears. It begins this Friday for the Frontier League Dual Tournament at Spring Hill High School.

The two-day tournament begins at 4 p.m. on Friday and will start up again at 10 a.m. on Saturday.

Koechner leads Wildcats at

Baldwin



Louisburg junior Mason Koechner locks his opponent up as he tries to get some back points, and eventually a pin, Saturday during the Baldwin Invitational. Koechner won the 220-pound weight class and was also the recipient of the Gorrarian Award.

BALDWIN CITY – Ever since the Louisburg wrestling team entered the Baldwin Invitational Tournament, the Wildcats have been slowly working their way up the team standings.

On Saturday, Louisburg had its highest finish ever at what is a competitive 16-team tournament. The Wildcats finished eighth overall with 126.5 points, but they were just a few points away from cracking the top five.

In all, the Wildcats had three wrestlers finish in the top three and one – Mason Koechner – which finished at the top of his weight class. Freshman Hunter Bindi came in second and senior Anders Vance was third.

“We’ve consistently improved in our performance at this meet,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “This is our highest finish since we added the Baldwin Invitational to our schedule. Prairie View and Burlington were just ahead of us, tied for sixth with 127.5 points. Smoky Valley was 5th with 130.5 points. Holton, the 2013 and 2014 state champions, was

ninth with 104 points.

"We had a major point scorer, Nathan Keegan, sitting out this tournament, too. Although we theoretically could have done even better, I'm still pretty proud of how well we competed."

That included Koechner, who pinned his way to the top spot at 220 pounds. The Louisburg junior was 4-0 on the day with four pins, including one of Santa Fe Trail's Trent Moore in the third period of the championship match. Koechner is currently ranked No. 3 at 220 pounds in Class 4A.



Freshman Hunter Bindi works for a pin Saturday during the Baldwin Invitational.

For his performance, Koechner (31-4) was also presented with the Gorrarian Award, which is given to the wrestler with the most pins in the least amount of time. This was the second year in a row a Louisburg wrestler has earned the honor, with Vance winning it a year ago.

"Mason had a pretty solid tournament," Bovaird said. "He had four pins with a total mat time of just over 14 minutes. He is becoming pretty dominant this season, especially when he is on top."

The Wildcats almost had another champion as Bindi (29-7)

nearly pulled off the upset of the tournament. Bindi, who wrestles at 106 pounds, had two quick first period pins that set up a match with Santa Fe Trail junior Christian Davis in the championship round.

Davis, who is the No. 1 ranked wrestler in Class 4A, got all he wanted from the Louisburg freshman. Bindi reversed Davis to his back and got two back points to cut the lead to one, and nearly got a third back point to tie the match, but Davis got off his back before the five-count.

"Hunter's finals match was definitely an exciting one," Bovaird said. "The kid he wrestled is tough and experienced. You don't find many juniors at the 106 pound weight class. Hunter held his own with him. That match could have gone our way on another day. Hunter is a competitor and I think he is going to surprise some people this month at regionals and state."

Vance also competed in a couple tight matches himself. The Louisburg heavyweight went 4-1 on the day to finish third and nearly made it to the finals match.

Vance, who won his first two matches, went up against Goodland's Luis Ledesma in the semifinals and eventually went to overtime before Ledesma won a 4-1 decision.

The Louisburg senior didn't get much time to rest as he went up against Santa Fe Trail's Gabe Forrest in the consolation round. Vance had to go to extra periods again, but he outlasted Forrest in two overtimes for a 4-3 decision.

For third place, Vance defeated Wamego's Tylar Patrick for a 4-0 decision to improve his record to 33-7 on the season.

"I think it was great that Anders got so much mat time this weekend," Bovaird said. "He only had one pin, which normally might concern me since he's been so dominant. However, at the state level, heavyweight matches often go the distance and

into overtime. Anders needs to be pushed at this point in the season so that he's used to these tight matches. We want him to be calm and clear-headed going into overtime and tie-breakers. In those matches, the wrestler with the coolest head seems to prevail.

"Even though Anders took a tough loss in the semis, he bounced back really well. A weekend like this one has done a lot to prepare him mentally for the big matches coming up soon."



Sophomore Tucker Batten flattens his opponent as he waits for a pin to be called Saturday in Baldwin.

Several other Wildcats got plenty of mat time as well.

Junior Lyndon Smith (195) finished sixth overall, while sophomore Kyle Allen (120) and senior Bradley Trageser (285) each came in seventh. Allen had three wins on the day, with all three coming by major decision. Trageser also had three wins, including two by pin.

Sophomore Thad Hendrix (113), freshman Blue Caplinger (145) and junior Ben Hupp (170) finished eighth.

Louisburg returns to the mat Wednesday for its final home dual of the season. The Wildcats host Lawrence High School for a

6:30 p.m. start.

It will also be a homecoming of sorts as the program will recognize Louisburg wrestling alumni during the varsity dual along with an alumni social at 5:30 p.m.