

Wildcats finish third at Fort Scott to open season



FORT SCOTT – With about half of the team competing in its first varsity action, the Louisburg wrestling team put together a strong showing in its season debut.

The Wildcats traveled to the Fort Scott Dual Tournament last Friday and left with a third place finish and a 3-2 record on the day.

Louisburg got wins over Blue Valley Southwest, Gardner-Edgerton and Anderson County and suffered a pair of close losses to Atchison County and Fort Scott.

“We have a relatively young team, but I’d say they did an awesome job battling on the mat Friday night,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “Our veteran wrestlers were scrappy and competitive, and our younger guys did their best to follow that lead.”

Seniors Kaven Bartlett and Elijah Eslinger led the Wildcats as both finished with a 5-0 record after each of them were ranked in the Class 4A preseason rankings.

Bartlett, who is ranked No. 6 at 138 pounds, recorded a pair of major decisions and a pin. He also battled Anderson County’s A.J. Schaffer to a 9-8 decision – an opponent he lost to a year ago.

As for Eslinger, who is the No. 5 heavyweight in Class 4A, he

also won all five matches. He earned three pins and one major decision.

"This season, we're going to see a lot more confidence from those two guys," Bovaird said. "They've been very driven since last season ended, and I feel like they're both on a mission to take things up a level from last year. Kaven had a great match against an Anderson County kid who'd beaten him last year.

"After getting a couple of quick takedowns and looking very strong on his feet, Kaven got caught in a weird move and found himself on his back, battling to stay alive. After fighting back to safety, he was then down 7-4, but he kept his composure and chipped away at that lead, one point at a time. He took the lead and held on for a 9-8 decision."

Sophomore Will Showalter was next on the team with four wins, including a pair of pins, at 106 pounds. Freshman Hayden Heffernon (113 pounds), junior J'Lee Collins (126), senior Jesse Murphy (152), sophomore Jay McCaskill (157), sophomore Braden Yoder (190) and senior Trace Eslinger (215) each finished with three wins

Senior Kyle Oram, who also wrestled at 215, won both of his matches. Freshman Keegan Rogers (120) and sophomore Mika McKitrick (132) both finished with a pair of wins.

Sophomore Logan Henry (132), senior Aidan Robinson (144) and senior Brecon Klugman (175) also won a match.

In its three victories, Louisburg defeated Blue Valley Southwest (56-23), Gardner Edgerton (60-24) and Anderson County (45-36). The Wildcats also suffered close losses to Atchison County (48-34) and Fort Scott (39-38).

Against Fort Scott, the Wildcats needed a pin from Elijah Eslinger in the final match to get the win. However, Fort Scott heavyweight Jaden Garcia kept fighting off Eslinger and

he was only able to get the 11-1 major decision.

“He fought and fought, but that Fort Scott heavyweight was stubborn as can be,” Bovaird said. “Elijah couldn’t quite get the pin, but he came away with a solid 11-1 major decision. That dual came down to bonus points – Fort Scott scored more bonus points than we did. It’s a tough lesson to learn, but one match can make the difference. If we give up fewer pins and we earn more, then that affects the team score.”

The Wildcats will try and improve its dual record Friday when it hosts the December Duals for its home opener. Louisburg will square off with Baldwin, Burlington, Concordia, Independence and Prairie View. Matches are set to begin at 4 p.m.

Wildcat wrestling ready to build on last season’s historic finish



Louisburg seniors Kaven Bartlett (pictured) and Elijah Eslinger return to lead the Wildcat wrestling team this season after both earned state medals a year ago.

The Louisburg wrestling team had an historic finish to its season last year.

For the first time in school history, the Wildcats finished with three state medalists. The good news for Louisburg, two of them are back for another run at a state title.

Seniors Kaven Bartlett (138 pounds) and Elijah Eslinger (285) return to lead the Wildcats for the 2022-23 season. The two seniors are a part of a 10-member senior class on a team that currently has 40 wrestlers.

Throw in the fact that the wrestlers have a new practice room to work out in, and they are excited for what this season has in store.

“Practices are great,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “We are loving the new wrestling room, and the guys have been working their tails off already. We started off with 45 kids and are down to 40 so far, but I love the wrestlers’ attitudes.”

Bartlett and Eslinger both finished sixth in the state after both made the state semifinals. Eslinger is currently ranked No. 5 in the preseason 4A rankings, while Bartlett is No. 6.



Louisburg senior Elijah Eslinger is currently ranked No. 5 in the Class 4A 285-pound division.

“Both guys have put in a lot of time in the offseason,” Bovaird said. “Kaven and Elijah both had strong finishes to their junior seasons, and the great thing is that they’ve been motivated to improve all throughout the offseason. They both want to wrestle in college and I love the examples they’re setting for the program.”

The Wildcats also return another state qualifier to lead the group in Ashton Moore. The Louisburg sophomore made it to the state tournament as a freshman, but will have to wait a little longer to get on the mat.

Moore is currently out with an injury he sustained during the football season, but Bovaird hopes to have him back after the new year.

“Sitting out is eating away at Ashton, you can tell,” Bovaird said. “Once he gets the all-clear to get back on the mat, he’s going to be a voracious competitor. He’ll need to overcome the obstacle of lost mat time, but with that kid’s work ethic and competitive nature, combined with his strength and athleticism, it’ll be a great season for him.”



Louisburg sophomore Ashton Moore was a state qualifier as a freshman last season.

Louisburg will have a mix of veterans and newcomers as it begins its journey for the 22-23 season.

Junior J'lee Collins (126 pounds), sophomore Mika McKitrick (132), senior Jesse Murphy (150), sophomore Jay McCaskill (157), sophomore Brayden Yoder (190), senior Trace Eslinger (190/215) and senior Kyle Oram (215) return with at least some varsity experience from a year ago.

The Wildcats will also lean on newcomers Will Showalter (106), freshman Hayden Heffernon (113), freshman Keegan Rogers (120), sophomore Logan Henry (126), senior Aidan Robinson (144), freshman Vance Hahn (165) and senior Brecon Klugman (175) as they will compete for time on the varsity level.

"We'll have some new faces on the mat this season, along with some veterans," Bovaird said. "Will Showalter is a strong athlete and he's finally filling his weight at 106. J'Lee Collins, Mika McKitrick and Logan Henry are going to be battling for spots at 126-132 early on. Jesse Murphy will be a solid guy at 144 or 150. A couple of sophomores in the higher weights are also going to make some waves in Jay McCaskill at 157 and Brayden Yoder at 190. Also, I've got two seniors at 215 with Trace Eslinger and Kyle Oram."

The Wildcats have high expectations for themselves this season, but Bovaird knows it is all about having the right frame of mind.

"One of our biggest focuses this year will be on our mindset," Bovaird said. "The season motto is 'It's a Psychological Thing,' from the legendary Dan Gable. Gable once said, 'It's a psychological thing. They fear it, but they know they can do it.' This season, we've got lots of experienced kids, but we want to be sure that we peak in February when we're supposed to peak, and we're going to work on overcoming all the psychological obstacles we possibly can."

Louisburg opens its season this Friday as it travels to the

Fort Scott Dual Tournament. Matches are set to begin at 3 p.m.

2022 Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year Nominees



For the past six years, Louisburg Sports Zone has given out Athlete of the Week awards during each of the three sports seasons. I do it to recognize special athletic achievements and to highlight the athletes.

For the fifth consecutive year, Louisburg Sports Zone will be handing out an Athlete of the Year honor to a male and female athlete at Louisburg High School. I wanted the opportunity to recognize those who exemplify what it means to be an “athlete.”

Although I am giving out the award, I wanted the process to be subjective, so I asked the head coaches at LHS to help me out. I asked each coach to send me nominations of who they thought exemplified the Athlete of the Year honor. They will then vote for their top 3 male and female athletes and then I will tabulate the results and determine the winner. The winner will be announced in the coming days.

Below are the nominees for the Male Athlete of the Year award

in alphabetical order by last name. Congrats to all those who were nominated and best of luck!



Aiden Barker, Senior, Football and Wrestling

Aiden Barker played big roles on both the Louisburg football and wrestling teams this past season. Barker was a starting lineman for the Wildcat football program and wrestled at 195 pounds for the wrestling team.

Barker was a key fixture on both sides of the ball for the Wildcat football team, but his biggest impact came on the defensive side. He was a first team All-Frontier League selection on the defensive line, where he finished with 58 tackles on the season to go along with 11 tackles for a loss

and 5.5 sacks.

On the wrestling mat, Barker finished his season with a 31-8 record and earned a fifth place medal at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina. He was named the Wildcats' wrestler of the year and is a two-time first team KWCA Academic all-state winner. He finished with titles at the December Duals, Tonganoxie and Louisburg Invitationals. He finished his career with a program record of career reversals with 74. He will continue his athletic and academic career as a member of the MidAmerica Nazarene University football program this fall.



Brandon Doles, Senior, Football,

Wrestling and Baseball

Brandon was a starter on three Wildcat programs during the 2021-22 school year. Doles was the starting linebacker on the football team, he was a varsity captain and 182-pound wrestler on the wrestling team and played the outfield and pitched for the Louisburg baseball program.

In football, Doles was a key part of the Wildcat defense as he earned first team all-league honors from the linebacker spot. He finished the season with 90 tackles and averaged 11 stops per contest. He also forced two fumbles and had 11 tackles for a loss during the Wildcats' 4-5 season.

Injuries hampered most of Doles' wrestling season, but he was able to make a comeback late in the season and made his way to his third state tournament. At 182 pounds, Doles was win one short of a medal and finished the year with a 9-5 record. Doles ended his career as a two-time team captain and first team KWCA Academic All-State recipient.

On the baseball diamond, Doles was one of the Wildcats' top hitters during the 2022 season that saw them end with an 8-14 record and a spot in the regional championship game. Doles, who started in left field, finished with a .338 average and a .969 OPS. He also had 24 hits, seven doubles and two home runs to go along with 17 RBIs and 22 runs scored. Doles also earned second team All-Frontier League honors.



Kolby Kattau, Senior, Football and Baseball

Kolby was a senior starter for both the Louisburg football and baseball teams this past season. Kattau was the starting first baseman and pitcher for the baseball program that reached the regional championship. He was a two-way starter on the football team at running back and safety.

On the baseball diamond, Kattau thrived for the 2022 season as he was named as a first-team All-Frontier and all-state selection for his play at first base. Kattau had a team-high .471 average in 82 plate appearances. He had an OPS of 1.294 and had 33 hits on the season with seven doubles, five triples and a home run. He also scored 24 runs and had 13 RBIs from the leadoff spot. He started five games for the Wildcats and

earned three wins with 25 strikeouts. Kattau was also selected to participate in the KABC all-star game.

On the football field, Kattau was one of the team's starting running backs and recorded two touchdowns with more than 200 yards of total offense. He also started at safety for much of the season as well, and finished with 27 tackles and three deflections.



Tom Koontz, Senior, Football and Track and Field

Tom was a starting defensive back for the Wildcat football team that finished with a 4-5 record, along with being a hurdler and sprinter on the Louisburg track team.

On the track, Koontz helped the Wildcats to a third place team finish at the Class 4A state meet as he earned a pair of state titles in the hurdles and two more medals on relays. Koontz won the 300-meter hurdles with a school record time of 38.98 seconds and also won the state title in the 110 hurdles for the second straight year in 14.61 seconds.

He also helped the 4×400 relay to a fourth place state finish and the 4×100 relay to a sixth place medal. Koontz was also a part of the 4×100 team that broke the school record earlier in the year. He ends his Wildcat career as a 3-time state champion in the hurdles and garnered eight state medals. He was also a member of the 2021 state championship team.

Koontz also made his presence known on the football field as he was a starting cornerback for the Wildcats. He finished the year with 46 tackles, four deflections and a forced fumble.



Maverick Rockers, Senior, Basketball and Baseball

Maverick played key roles for the Wildcat basketball and baseball teams this season. Rockers was the starting point guard in basketball and made an impact on the baseball team as the starting shortstop.

On the baseball diamond, Rockers helped the Wildcats to their second straight regional championship game and had a big year at the plate. Rockers finished with a .406 batting average with a 1.111 OPS. He recorded 28 hits, seven doubles and two home runs to go along with 22 runs scored and 16 RBIs. He also had just six errors from his shortstop position. Following the season, he was named as a second team All-Frontier League player.

Rockers also had a big year on the basketball court as the team's starting point guard. He averaged 11 points a game to go along with three rebounds, two assists and 1.5 steals a game.



Michael Seuferling, Senior, Soccer and Basketball

Michael had big seasons for the Louisburg soccer and basketball teams in 2021-22. Seuferling was a starting defender for the Wildcat soccer team that made it to the regional championship game and was a starting guard for the Wildcat basketball program.

On the soccer field, Seuferling was one of the best outside backs in the Frontier League and was a first team all-league performer for Louisburg. He was also a first-team all-state player as he helped the Wildcats to a No. 1 seed in the Class 4-1A state playoffs.

Seuferling was also one of the top basketball players in the

Frontier League as earned honorable mention honors after leading the Wildcats in scoring. He averaged 13.3 points per contest to go along with 3.4 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.



Braden Yows, Senior, Soccer

Braden had a big season for the Louisburg boys soccer team as he helped lead the Wildcats to the No. 1 seed in the Class 4-1A state playoffs and a spot in the regional championship game.

Yows was named as a first-team All-Frontier League and all-state player from his midfield spot and was named team captain. He ended his season with a 17 goals and 11 assists. He will continue his soccer career this fall at the University

of Missouri-Kansas City.

Wildcats earn three state medals for first time in program history



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker puts Ottawa's Jarod Ferguson to the mat during the fifth-place match Saturday at the Class 4A State Wrestling Championships in Salina.

Louisburg wrestling has had its fair share of state medalists in its long history, but what the Wildcats accomplished last weekend at the Tony's Pizza Events Center in Salina was something the program had never seen before.

The Wildcats left the Class 4A state tournament with three state medalists, the most for one year in program history.

Aiden Barker (195 pounds), Kaven Bartlett (126) and Elijah Eslinger (285) each finished in the top six in their respective weight classes and put together their best performances of the season. It was also the first time each of them earned a state medal.

"This season was the most state placers we've had in a single year in program history," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said.

“Prior to 1992, KSHSAA only medaled the top 4 in each weight. In both 1988 and 1989, we had two top-4 placers and one top-6 placer, but this really shows how the program is progressing and developing. We nearly had four medalists, too.”

Barker, a senior, was a favorite for a medal heading into Salina and finished fifth overall with a 13-1 major decision over Ottawa’s Jared Ferguson in the fifth-place match.



Aiden Barker hugs coach Bobby Bovaird after winning his fifth place match Saturday in Salina.

He opened the tournament with a quick pin of Independence’s Isaiah Melugin and advanced to the quarterfinals against the tournament favorite, Wamego’s Hayden Oviatt, who was undefeated heading into state.

Oviatt, who had pinned Barker earlier in the season, got an unexpected test for the Louisburg senior. Barker battled Oviatt for three period and nearly pulled off the upset of the tournament, but lost a close 7-6 decision.

"With Oviatt I had a lot to prepare for," Barker said. "It's always tough when you go against an opponent who has an undefeated record and previously beaten you in a decisive fashion. I really had to get my head straight and see that match as just another match against another good kid."

"Honestly going into it, I didn't think I was going to win, but once I stepped out onto the mat I thought 'why not me?' As the match progressed, I just believed in myself more and more and honestly I don't think I've wrestled a match as good as I did in that match."

The loss forced Barker to wrestle on the back side of the bracket and reeled off a pin over Baldwin's Zayne Nowak in his first match Saturday. He then followed it up with a pin of Tonganoxie's Wyatt Harris in the first period to secure a state medal.



Louisburg assistant coach Shawn Crossley and Elijah Eslinger were all smiles after Aiden Barker secured his first state

medal.

In the consolation semis, Barker suffered a difficult 8-6 loss to Rose Hill's Cade Evans, which set up a rematch with Ferguson, who defeated Barker in the regional championship a week before.

"Wrestling for third would have been great, but getting that revenge match against Ferguson to end it all was all I could ask for," Barker said. "The season overall I couldn't have asked for anything better than having some new coaches stepping in and doing a great job. It really meant a lot to me to finish off my career with coaches as great as coach Crossley, coach Miller and coach Bovaird in my corner and to walk out of my last ever match with a win and feel the emotions of the coaches and the Louisburg wrestling community it was like none other."

Late in the match against Ferguson, up 13-0, Barker did something that caught Bovaird's eye and it left him more proud of his senior wrestler than he already was.

"Aiden wrestled tough and smart, and in the final seconds of that fifth place match, he did something that gave me chills," Bovaird said. "He saw the final seconds ticking away and gave his opponent the escape. As they walked back to the center of the mat, Aiden raised his opponent's hand. I asked him later what was going on, and he answered that he didn't want the kid to go scoreless in the last match of his senior year. Talk about character right there – sportsmanship like that and the small gesture of respect goes a long way in my book."



Kaven Bartlett works for a pin against Holcomb's Greg Martinez in the first round Friday at Salina.

Bartlett and Eslinger also left lasting impressions on the Wildcat program as each medaled sixth overall after both nearly turned their brackets upside down as they advanced to the semifinals on Friday. They both guaranteed themselves a medal on the first day.

However, Bartlett's journey didn't look all the optimistic as he found himself on his back in his first round match against Holcomb's Greg Martinez. The Louisburg junior had to battle off his back for the final minute of the first period.

After surviving the scare, Bartlett would go on to pin Martinez in the second period and put his special weekend into motion.

"One centimeter made the difference for Kaven and his state tournament," Bovaird said. "Had he been pinned in the first period of that opening match, it would have been an entirely

different tournament for him. Regardless, he battled through the rest of that match to get the pin, and he fought every second of the rest of his matches. He's proven that he can compete with the top wrestlers in the state – in fact, he's now one of them. He's made incredible strides this season, and I'm excited for next year."



Head coach Bobby Bovaird (left) and assistant Shawn Crossley let out some emotion following Bartlett's quarterfinal win Friday.

Bartlett would use that momentum to upset No. 5 Cooper Wuthnow from Abilene in a 4-2 decision in overtime. Bartlett nearly earned another upset in the semifinals, but couldn't get past Concordia's Daniel Vines in a 3-1 loss.

Bartlett would have to wrestle Tonganoxie's Braeden Moore, who was the No. 1 ranked wrestler coming into the tournament, in the consolation semifinals and lost a tough 4-1 decision. He

then wrestled McPherson's Treyton Pelnar for fifth and fell 2-0 in the final seconds of overtime.

"Saturday was a very tough day as I started off against the number 1 ranked kid in 4A and ranked second in all classes in my first match," Bartlett said. "This guy has been one of the only people to pin me in my high school career but I made the match way closer at state as I lost 4-1.

"I have a lot of great plans for next season as I have chose to focus on just wrestling. I have plans to do a lot of tournaments and camps around the nation this summer to get me prepared for next season."



Kaven Bartlett was pumped following his quarterfinal win in overtime Friday.

Eslinger provided some memorable moments of his own as he upset two state-ranked wrestlers in his first two matches of

the day. He pinned No. 5 Willy Jon Morales of Augusta and No. 6 Jake Eddington of Columbus in the first period to advance to the quarterfinals.

“I knew going into the state tournament that Elijah would have perhaps the toughest path to a state medal – that a couple things would have to go his way early in the tournament,” Bovaird said. That’s exactly what happened. In the 285 weight class, sometimes it just takes a little bit of faith and a whole lot of stubbornness, and that’s what Elijah did. He went out there and wrestled hard, but he had some fun and believed in himself.”

Eslinger was later pinned by Rose Hill’s Milan Colvin in the semifinals, and would fall to Morales in the consolation semifinals by a 5-0 decision and then was pinned by Clay Center’s Luke Young in the fifth-place match.



Louisburg's Elijah Eslinger puts Columbus' Jake Eddington on his back for a pin Friday during the state quarterfinal round.

"I feel that I wrestled good and was allowed to run my preferred move on my opponents," Eslinger said. "I was extremely surprised to learn that they were both ranked wrestlers after the matches.

"Getting a state medal does make me excited for next season as the team focuses on the phrase, 'Continuous Improvement.' However high I got this year, I'm going to do better next year."



Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird and Elijah Eslinger were all smiles after earning his first state medal Friday.

Amidst all the excitement, the Wildcats also watched two wrestlers leave Salina without a medal, including senior Brandon Doles.

Doles, who missed all of last season with a leg injury and missed the first half of this season with a shoulder problem, found himself one victory away from earning his first state medal.

After a tough first round loss in a 2-1 ultimate tie-breaker setback to Burlington's Brock Zimmerman, Doles had to wrestle on the consolation side and got a win Friday in a close 4-3 decision over Clearwater's Alec Beasley.

Doles then put together some more dramatics as he scored two points in the final seconds to pull off a 7-5 decision over Augusta's Thomas Johnson. That set up a rematch between Doles and Jeff West's Keaton Shelman.

The two met in the third-place match at regionals the week before, with Doles winning 3-1 in overtime.

It was the same score, but different result, as Shelman got a late takedown in the third period to end Doles' hopes of a medal.



Louisburg senior Brandon Doles scrambles to try and get a reversal late in his consolation quarterfinal match.

“Brandon’s final match was heart-breaking for us all, most of all him,” Bovaird said. “He’s overcome so much – losing his entire junior season to his broken leg from football and missing more than half of his senior season to that nagging shoulder injury. When I think about the determination, courage, and focus he showed by getting back in as good a wrestling shape as he possibly could, getting recertified after getting cleared to return to the mat, and battling it out with kids who’d already wrestled in 30-plus matches this season, I’m so proud of him.

“He nearly got in the back side of the bracket to earn a state medal. I think a fully healthy Brandon Doles with a full senior season would have been right there in contention for a state medal. The majority of wrestlers coming back from that much time away from competition would have struggled to get as far as Brandon did.”

Freshman Ashton Moore put together two strong showings in his state matches, but lost a 7-4 decision to El Dorado's Terek White and was pinned by McPherson's Jase Fitzmorris in the first round of consolation.

"Ashton had a great season as a freshman in an upper-middle weight class," Bovaird said. "He was one win shy of hitting the 30-win mark this season, too. He's shown that he's a coachable kid who can get physical when he needs to and can exercise some mental discipline that is pretty uncanny for someone his age. Throw in the fact that he's been battling at practice with teammate Brayden Yoder all season. Those two, once we get them in separate weight classes, will be scoring a lot of points for the program the next three years."

Wildcat wrestlers eye medal stand at state tournament



SALINA – The five members of the Louisa County wrestling team will be more than hungry to try and get to the medal stand this weekend at the Class 4A state tournament in Salina.

Kaven Bartlett (126 pounds), Ashton Moore (170), Brandon Doles (182), Aiden Barker (195) and Elijah Eslinger (285) will represent Louisa County and they have all set goals for themselves.

The biggest of which is that coveted state medal, something that none of the five have been able to garner during their high school career. Although Moore is a freshman, the other four have been eying a trip to the medal stand for the last couple of years.

Now, they are as close as ever to achieving that milestone.

"In all honesty, each of our wrestlers has a legitimate chance of bringing home a state medal this year," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "I've gone through the brackets, and even before I shared the brackets with the guys, I can tell that they're shooting for their next goal. Making it to state was one goal; they've turned the page and are focusing on the next one.

"They're not just happy with making it to Salina; they all want to bring home some hardware. Aiden and Brandon have been especially driven this year. They've been leaders on and off the mat, in the classroom and in other sports, and I'm excited to see what they're capable of doing this weekend."

Barker is the lone Wildcat that is ranked by the Kansas Wrestling Coaches Association and is the No. 4 wrestler at 195 pounds and one of the favorites to finish in the top six and get a medal.

Barker (27-6) opens against Independence's Isaiah Melugin (15-14). Should Barker advance, he will very well could see the state's No. 1 wrestler, Hayden Oviatt from Wamego, in the next round.

As for Doles, who missed the state tournament last season with an injury, this is his third state appearance.

Doles (7-3) opens against Burlington's Brock Zimmerman (27-10), who he has lost two twice this season when Doles was just coming back from an injury.

Bartlett (26-8), who will wrestle for the first time out in Salina, is coming off a big regional performance where he finished second. He will square off with Holcomb's Greg Martinez (23-11) in his first match.

Moore (25-11) will enter the state tournament as a young 170-pounder and is the only freshman in the bracket after taking second at regionals. He will face off with El Dorado's Terek White (20-10) to begin tournament action.

Eslinger (26-8) will also be making his first trip to Salina after the Wildcat heavyweight took third at regionals. He will wrestle Augusta's Willy Jon Morales (33-8), who is ranked No. 5 in the state.

The Wildcats have spent the last three days of practice preparing for all the obstacles the state tournament as in store for them.

"Practices have been pretty solid this week," Bovaird said. "We've have our state qualifiers plus several practice partners who volunteered to come in to help them get ready for state. The atmosphere has been focused and positive.

"The guys have come in ready to work, gotten that work finished, and put in a lot of smart work over the last three days. The goal is to maintain our upward trajectory so that we get our highest peak at the state tournament."

To view all the state tournament brackets, [click here](#).

Matches will begin at 10 a.m. on Friday at the Tony's Pizza Events Center in Salina, and the tournament will run through Saturday.

FANTASTIC FIVE: Wildcats qualify 5 for state tournament



Louisburg's (from left) Kaven Bartlett, Brandon Doles, Elijah Eslinger, Aiden Barker and Ashton Moore each qualified for the state tournament following Saturday's Class 4A regional tournament in Paola.

PAOLA – The roller coaster that was the Class 4A regional tournament had several highs and lows for the Louisburg wrestling team.

However, when the ride was done, five Wildcats punched their ticket to the Class 4A state tournament this weekend in Salina.

Senior Aiden Barker, junior Kaven Bartlett and freshman Ashton Moore finished as regional runners-up, while senior Brandon Doles and junior Elijah Eslinger both took third overall Saturday in Paola.

"On paper, I thought we had a shot to get 7-8 qualified," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "I just felt pretty good about how the guys have been practicing and competing. A few things would have had to go our way, but that's the way it goes sometimes. It's a pretty good feeling to have gotten three into the finals and to have the other two win their 3rd place matches at the end of the day."

Barker, who was ranked third the state at 195 pounds, squared off with No. 6 Jared Ferguson from Ottawa after pinning his way to the finals. The Louisburg senior had beaten him twice already this season, and looked like he was going to do it again.



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker finished second at 195 pounds.

Barker (27-6) built an 8-2 lead into he second period after putting Ferguson on his back on a couple different occasions. Unfortunately, Ferguson caught Barker and pinned him in the second to prevent him from getting a regional title.

“Aiden looked dominant for 98 percent of that match,” Bovaird said. “He got a great takedown and then was having his way on top. Aiden got in a scramble and did the one thing we were yelling for him not to do, and it ended up costing him. (Ferguson) is a pinner – when he gets kids on their back, it’s tough for them to get off.”

Bartlett got some revenge of his own at 126 pounds. He squared off with Paola’s Ryan Pankov in the semifinals, who he lost to

twice earlier this season and Pankov was No. 3 in the state going into the tournament.

The Louisburg junior scored some big points late as he held on for a 7-6 decision to defeat Pankov and advance to the finals. Unfortunately, Bartlett ran up against No. 1 Braeden Moore of Tonganoxie and was pinned in the first period of the championship match.



Louisburg junior Kaven Bartlett works for some back points Saturday at the 4A regional tournament.

"Kaven's semifinal match is one that I'll remember for a long time," Bovaird said. "He'd lost to that kid twice before, and it's always been a physical match and really close. Kaven stuck to his game plan and kept his cool through a very physical match, and he never stopped wrestling.

"It paid off big-time as he got the reversal and the winning back points to get a 7-6 revenge win. He was on a mission, and his regional performance really put him in a great place for state."

Moore (25-11), who was wrestling in his first regional tournament, put together three strong wins to get to the finals at 170 pounds.

He opened with a wild 15-9 win over Ottawa's John Sink and then won by decision over Topeka-Hayden's Broderick Desch and Perry-Lecompton's Christian Conklin.

Moore squared off with Tonganoxie's Tyler Pankey, who is ranked No. 4 in the state, and was pinned in the first period.

"Ashton really stepped up," Bovaird said. "For a freshman to be a regional finalist at a middle-weight like 170 pounds is a pretty impressive feat. He kept his head and withstood whatever pressure he might have been feeling."



Louisburg senior Brandon Doles celebrates his overtime victory Saturday in his third-place match.

As for Doles (7-3), the Louisburg senior has been wrestling less than half a season after coming off an injury, but came

through with a strong performance to send him to his third state tournament.

He opened with a 3-0 decision over Santa Fe Trail's Aidan Slavin, before meeting Tonganoxie's Gabriel Bailey in the semifinals, who is the No. 1 ranked wrestler at 182 pounds, and lost 9-3.

Doles bounced back win a pin over Paola's Bryson Schull in the consolation semifinals, and then outlasted Jeff West's Keaton Shelman for a 3-1 overtime victory to finish third.

"We're really starting to get some glimpses of the old Brandon, and it's exciting to see," Bovaird said. "He has been getting closer and closer to wrestling shape, and that was evident in his semifinals loss to the No. 1 wrestler in the state. On the back side, he pulled out an overtime win against a Jeff West wrestler who has 32 wins on the season and was the third seed in the tournament."

Eslinger also had a big tournament at 285 pounds as the Louisburg junior put together a 4-1 record. He opened with a pair of pins over Hayden's Hunter Diederich and Tonganoxie's Cooper Jones.

After getting pinned by Bishop Miege's Baker North in the semifinals, Eslinger (26-8) responded with a 4-1 decision over Diederich in the consolation semis to secure his spot at state. He then followed it up with a 53 second pin of Baldwin's Jake Van Horn in the third place match.

"Elijah had beaten most of the other guys in his bracket throughout the season, but regionals is always a crazy tournament," Bovaird said. "It's tough to beat a good wrestler once, let alone multiple times, and Elijah did just that – he had rematches with Tonganoxie and Baldwin, and he also had to beat the Topeka-Hayden kid twice."

Junior Jesse Murphy (152 pounds) and freshman Jay McCaskill

(138) found themselves one victory away from earning a spot at state as both reach the consolation semifinals.

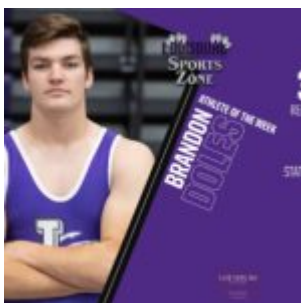
Murphy was pinned by an opponent from Eudora, but McCaskill's match had more drama.

McCaskill led Royal Valley's Quinton Nelson 4-1 with 15 seconds left and the wrestlers had to restart at the center of the mat. Unfortunately, McCaskill got caught in a scramble and gave up reversal and back points in a 5-4 loss.

All five qualifiers will compete at the Class 4A state tournament beginning at 10 a.m. on Friday in Salina and the top six in each weight class will earn a medal.

"With the strong finishes at regionals, all five of our guys are in good positions in their brackets at state," Bovaird said. "They're all going to have great chances not just to win some matches, but to bring home state medals."

Week 10 Athlete of the Week: Brandon Doles



Here is the Louisburg Sports Zone Athlete of the Week for week 10 of the winter sports season, sponsored by Louisburg Family Dental.

BRANDON DOLES, SENIOR, BOYS WRESTLING

Louisburg senior Brandon Doles put together a strong regional tournament Saturday in Paola. Doles finished third overall at 182 pounds and qualified for state for the third time in his high school career. He missed all of last season with an injury, and missed the first half of this season, before coming back to post a 7-3 record.

Doles opened the regional tournament with a 3-0 decision, before falling to the eventual regional champion. He battled back on the consolation side and eventually wrestled for third. Doles won this third-place match by a 3-1 decision in overtime.

The athlete of the week award is announced every Wednesday morning during the winter season and the winner is selected by Louisburg Sports Zone with the help of nominations from coaches.

Previous winners:

Week 1: Elijah Eslinger

Week 2: Maverick Rockers

Week 3: Aiden Barker

Week 4: Kaven Bartlett

Week 5: Michael Seuferling

Week 6: Cole Brown

Week 7: Jordan Mynsted

Week 8: Adyson Ross

Week 9: Bailey Hallas

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Wildcats sweep Leavenworth, Piper on Senior Night



Louisburg senior Aidan Cannon works for a pin against his Piper opponent last Thursday during the Wildcats' dual on Senior Night at Louisburg High School.

Before entering its most important tournament of the season, the Louisburg wrestling team had a chance to honor its senior class and did so in style.

Louisburg hosted Piper and Leavenworth in a double dual last Thursday for Senior Night at Louisburg High School and the Wildcats took care of business in impressive fashion.

The Wildcats downed Leavenworth 54-27 and then followed it up with a 54-16 victory over Piper to end their regular season on a good note. It also sent seniors Aiden Barker, Brandon Doles, Aidan Cannon, Bailey Hallas, along with managers Toni Caplinger and Amber Pritchett, out as winners on their home mat.

The seniors, and the rest of the team, have come a long way since their freshmen season.



(From left) Brandon Doles, Amber Pritchett, Aiden Barker, Toni Caplinger, Bailey Hallas and Aidan Cannon were honored on Senior Night last Thursday.

“When Aiden and Brandon were freshmen, we only had four kids in that class, and the team only had 17 kids on it,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “That was an abnormally small group,

but look at what we've grown to. We have 46 kids out this year, and the senior class picked up two more wrestlers (Bailey Hallas and Aidan Cannon), and they've done an awesome job of contributing to the program."

Against Leavenworth, sophomore Noah Cotter opened with a pin at 106 pounds and Kaven Bartlett won by forfeit to give Louisburg an early 12-10 lead. Sophomore J'Lee Collins got a pin at 132 and junior Jesse Murphy rallied back to get a pin at 152 to help give the Wildcats a two-point advantage.

Then, the Wildcats got on a roll. Louisburg got pins in five of its next six matches from Lucas Swartz, Ashton Moore, Doles, Barker and Elijah Eslinger to secure the 54-28 win.

Louisburg continued that dominance against Piper. Freshmen Colton Blue (113) and Mike McKitrick (120) each got pins, as did Bartlett at 126 to take an 18-4 lead.

Freshman Jay McCaskill got a pin at 138 pounds, while Cannon got a win by pin in his lone match of the night at 145 pounds.



Senior Brandon Doles picks up his Leavenworth opponent and sends him to the mat last Thursday during his 182 pound match.

Moore and Doles followed that up with wins by decision, while Barker and Eslinger got victories by pins and Cameron McClellan won by forfeit at 220.

The Wildcats hope to use that momentum into postseason action. Louisburg will travel to Paola on Saturday for the Class 4A regional tournament as the top four finishes in each weight class will qualify for the state tournament.

"We're definitely excited for it," Bovaird said. "Regionals is a weird time each year, and I think we've got the ability to

hit our peak at the right time so that we achieve our goals at state."

Wildcats medal six at Frontier League meet



Louisburg senior Aiden Barker works for a pin last Wednesday during the league meet at Eudora High School. Barker finished second at 195 pounds.

EUDORA –The first postseason test for the Louisburg wrestling team came last Wednesday as the Wildcats competed in the Frontier League Tournament.

Louisburg more than made its mark as six Wildcats earned league medals – four of which made the finals at Eudora High School.

Colton Blue (113 pounds), Ashton Moore (170), Brandon Doles (182), Aiden Barker (195) each made the finals and all finished second at league. Kaven Bartlett (126) was third and Elijah Eslinger (285) took fourth.

As a team, the Wildcats were sixth overall with 134 points. Tonganoxie won the league title with 197 points and Paola was second with 176.

"In all honesty, I wanted to finish higher as a team," Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. "I wanted to have multiple league champs, and I wanted to win several of those matches that were either rematches from previous meets or regional match-ups we'd need to win. It was a bitter-sweet night because we didn't have any league champs, and we lost several of those key matches. But at the same time, we had several matches that we battled from start to finish. We may not have won them, but I'm so proud of the fight we gave."

"The Frontier League has been getting tougher and tougher every year I've been here. This year alone, we've got 17 state-ranked wrestlers in our league and 11 who have been ranked previously in the year. We've got 27 returning state / substate qualifiers as well. The Frontier League is awesome competition – just what we need to take our final strides of improvement to regionals."

Barker, who is ranked No. 3 at 195 pounds in Class 4A, squared off with Spring Hill's Draven Pipkin (No. 4 in 5A) and fell in a 10-5 decision in the championship match. Prior to that, Barker had two pins, including one of Tonganoxie's Wyatt Harris in the semifinals.



Louisburg senior Brandon Doles gets some back points last week at Eudora.

As for Doles, he defeated Bonner Springs' Dakota Mortell by a 10-0 major decision in the semifinals and then met Baldwin's Jack Harvey in the finals. Harvey, who is a state-ranked wrestler himself, pinned Doles in the first period.

In his first league tournament, Blue had a big day at 113 pounds as he won by major decision in his first match and then pinned Spring Hill's James Sheldon to reach the finals.

Blue then went up against fellow freshman Xander Meinig of Paola. In what was a back-and-forth match, Meinig defeated Blue by a 13-9 decision in what could have gone either way.



Louisburg freshman Colton Blue finished second at 113 pounds last week during the league meet in Eudora.

Moore, who also participated in his first league tourney, earned a pin in his first match and then defeated Piper's Sawyer Vas, 3-0, in the semifinals. He then faced Tyler Pankey, who is ranked No. 4 in 4A, and was pinned in the first period.

"Everyone had pretty legit opponents in the finals," Bovaird said. "Blue lost 9-13 to a Paola kid who's ranked 6th at state, Moore lost by pin to the 4th ranked kid from Tonganoxie, Doles lost by pin to the #3 ranked kid from Baldwin, and Barker lost 5-10 to the #4 ranked kid in 5A from Spring Hill. Bartlett lost 5-3 to the #3 ranked kid from Paola in the semifinals as well.

"That's just how it is – the league is tough as nails, and you've got to credit the other programs for elevating our league to that level. It's good all-around – we battle each other at league and get each other ready for regionals and state."



Louisburg freshman Ashton Moore was second at 170 pounds at the Frontier League meet.

Bartlett squared off with Paola's Ryan Pankov in the

semifinals at 126 pounds and lost a close 5-3 decision. The Louisburg junior bounced back as he pinned Piper's Payton Mills in the consolation semifinals, before pinning Ottawa's Trevor Kaub for third overall.

Eslinger, the team's heavyweight, recorded a pair of pins on the day, but lost his third place match to Piper's Chris Craig in a tough 4-3 decision to take fourth overall.

Sophomore Noah Cotter (106) took fifth overall, while freshman Mika McKitrick (120) and freshman Lucas Swartz (160) finished sixth. Sophomore J'Lee Collins (132) and freshman Jay McCaskill (138) were seventh and senior Aidan Cannon (145) took eighth.

Week 9 Athlete of the Week: Bailey Hallas



Here is the Louisburg Sports Zone Athlete of the Week for week nine of the winter sports season, sponsored by Dr. Laura's Orthodontics.

BAILEY HALLAS, SENIOR, GIRLS

WRESTLING

Louisburg senior Bailey Hallas made Louisburg history earlier this month as she became the first Lady Cat to earn a Frontier League medal as she finished fourth at 109 pounds at the league tournament in Eudora. This was her second year as a member of the Louisburg girls wrestling team.

Hallas was the lone member of the team this year and saw her season come to an end last Saturday at regionals. Still, the Louisburg senior played a big part of the Louisburg program.

“Although her season ended this past weekend, she’s the first girl wrestler to finish 2 complete seasons,” Louisburg coach Bobby Bovaird said. “She’s the foundation upon which the success of every girl wrestler who competes for LHS will be built. Every record that will be set has begun with her. Every placement that our girls will achieve will be based on the precedent she set.”

The athlete of the week award is announced every Wednesday morning during the winter season and the winner is selected by Louisburg Sports Zone with the help of nominations from coaches.

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Week 1: Elijah Eslinger

Week 2: Maverick Rockers

Week 3: Aiden Barker

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Week 5: Michael Seuferling

Week 6: Cole Brown

Week 7: Jordan Mynsted

Week 8: Adyson Ross



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