

OPINION: Lady Cats inspired fans with successful season



The Louisburg High School volleyball team celebrated a point during the Class 4A-Division I state tournament on Oct. 27 in Salina.

It has been more than a week since the Louisburg High School volleyball team had to watch Rose Hill storm the court and celebrate its second straight state championship.

Trying to figure out just how much those Lady Cat players were hurting as Rose Hill won match point is something that is difficult to quantify. Needless to say, it was probably a lot.

On three different occasions, Louisburg found itself one point away from winning a state title and becoming in the first team in Lady Cat history to win a team championship in any sport.

The loss was gut-wrenching – at least it was for me.

If I could feel that horrible, I can't imagine what those players were going through. I didn't have a child on the team, nor was I there during the offseason and practice to see how much work the girls put into the season, but I could still feel their pain from across the court.

The entire Louisburg fan base that made the trek to Salina could feel it too. There were a lot of people who connected with this group of girls. They watched as these players grew

throughout the season and saw the potential they had.

There weren't many opponents that were all that excited about facing the thundering kills of Anna Dixon or Sophie McMullen, or the stingy Louisburg defense that got better as the season went on. Riley Kallevig, Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Carson Buffington, McMullen and Dixon all came up with big digs throughout the year and became a strength of the team.

Middle hitters Haley Cain and Mikayla Quinn, along with outside hitter Erin Lemke, saw their confidence grow and it showed in the state tournament. They came up with big plays against Bishop Miege and Rose Hill to help Louisburg go undefeated in pool play to start the state tournament.

Buffington also became comfortable as the team's full-time setter as she had good chemistry with her hitters, especially McMullen and Dixon. When it mattered most, the Lady Cats were a well-oiled machine.

It was all set up to be a happy ending for Louisburg volleyball – a program that has suffered heartbreak several times on the state level. The Lady Cats have a number of runner-up, third and fourth place finishes, but haven't been able to pin down that championship.

As bad as that loss hurt, Louisburg continues to build on its rich volleyball tradition. To finish second in the state is a fantastic accomplishment and one that shouldn't be forgotten.

This team also showed a younger generation of players what it takes to become great and 'Believe The Hype' – the motto the Lady Cats used all season to remind themselves what it means to be a Louisburg volleyball player.

Let me share one, very small example, with you.

My daughter, who is in elementary school, has just started playing volleyball. She is really starting to enjoy it and

wants to get better at it.

She is always banging the ball on the wall in her room or against the garage door. The noises drive me nuts.

In just a few months time, she has become interested a sport I never thought she would like. Part of the reason is she sees the success this Lady Cat team has enjoyed.

When Louisburg qualified for the second day of the state tournament, she wanted to go with me to Salina. A girl, who is normally a pain the butt to get up early for school, had no problems waking up at 6 a.m. and making the drive with her dad.

She wanted to support her favorite Lady Cats.

To the Lady Cat players – I just wanted to let you know, that even in a loss, she had a time that she will never forget. You also probably already know this, but you have a lot of other little girls around town who look up to you all and are inspired by what you have accomplished.

There are girls, like my daughter, who have aspirations of hitting the ball as hard as Anna or Sophie when they get to high school, or maybe setting them up like Carson. Maybe they want to be in the middle of it all like Haley and Mikayla, or just maybe they want to dive on the floor for a dig like Riley and Reilly.

You may have not captured a state championship, but you won the hearts of a lot of future Lady Cat volleyball players. You taught them what it takes to believe in themselves and come together as a team.

Your performance at state shows what it takes to keep a strong tradition alive.

You showed them what it means to 'Believe the Hype.'

So for that ladies – thank you for taking all of us on the ride with you. It was a season a lot of us will always remember – not with disappointment – but with pride.