

Lady Cats survive test at Paola



Louisburg senior Lauren Dunn sends a kill over the outstretched arms of a Paola blocker during Tuesday's road contest in Paola. Louisburg defeated Paola 3-2 in the best of five sets and had to rally from 2-1 down to win.

PAOLA – Madison Turner wasn't about to give in and neither were the rest of her Louisburg volleyball teammates.

The Lady Cats found themselves on the verge of their first Frontier League defeat, and to make matters worse, it was against rival Paola on Tuesday during the Panthers' senior night. In the final two sets of the night, Louisburg showed why it is the favorite to win the league.

Down after three sets, the Lady Cats rallied to defeat Paola 25-23, 22-25, 23-25, 25-14 and 17-15 to get their third league victory of the season.

Louisburg ran away with the fourth set, and in a back-and-forth fifth set, Turner's play at the net was the difference as she provided pivotal kills and blocks to pull it out. The Louisburg senior middle hitter finished with 20 kills and 20 blocks on the night.

"It was really nice to get the win," Turner said. "We started

playing together more at the end. We started out slow, but we were able to put it together. We just weren't talking as much as we needed to and we weren't playing together in the beginning, but I was glad to see us finish it out."

The deciding fifth set encompassed the entire match as it was back-and-forth that provided a lot of drama. The Lady Cats jumped out to an 8-3 lead after a kill, tip and an ace from Turner, while fellow middle blockerCate Stambaugh also had a kill and block.

Paola roared back and went on a 9-2 run and eventually took a 12-10 lead in the first-to-15 set. Freshman Anna Dixon came through to tie the match on back-to-back kills, while Turner added a kill and a block to give Louisburg a 14-13 advantage.



Louisburg's Madison Turner (left) and Olivia Bradley celebrate a big point Tuesday in Paola.

Junior Olivia Bradley and Turner teamed for several blocks on a long volley that was also key to giving Louisburg the lead.

The Panthers didn't fold as they recorded back-to-back points to eventually take a 15-14 lead. One more point and Paola

would steal the match, but Turner came up with a kill to tie it at 15-all, while senior Lauren Dunn and Stambaugh followed with a kill and a block, respectively, to seal the win.

"I was glad to see that the team didn't give up, and they handled the pressure well," Louisburg coach Jessica Compliment said. "Paola puts together a great crowd and a great student section every time we go there to play. The team never let the crowd or the energy of the Paola team intimidate them which I was pleased to see. Paola has been the first team to really push us and test our limits. We needed that to help us see where we are as a team and how we can play under pressure."

Louisburg (22-9) got big performances from several other players along with Turner's 20-20 output. Stambaugh led Louisburg with 21 blocks and finished with 12 kills, while setter Sophie McMullen led the attack with 49 assists. McMullen also shined on defense as she finished second on the team with 14 digs and had 10 blocks.

Dunn and Dixon played well at the net with 12 kills on the night. Dixon also finished with three aces and had 11 digs.

Senior libero Makenzie Kallevig led the Lady Cat back row with 25 digs and fellow senior Megan Lemke added 12.

"Madison had a big night at the net, and she definitely pulled through with some big plays that either helped stop Paola's momentum or helped us pick up our momentum," Compliment said. "Anna had a few big hits as well. Overall, each player made some key plays when we needed them. Olivia Bradley had a few big blocks right at the end that helped us maintain our energy and momentum."

The match started out just like it ended. The two teams traded leads throughout the first set and Paola held a 23-22 late. However, Turner responded with two kills and Dunn added another to give the Lady Cats a good start.

In the second set, it was Louisburg that had the late 21-18 advantage, but Paola went on a 7-1 run to even the match. The Panthers held the lead through much of the third set and held on for the win despite two kills from Turner and another from Dunn to tie it at 23-all.

The Lady Cats didn't hold anything back in the fourth set. Louisburg went on a 7-1 run to take a 17-8 lead that it wouldn't give up thanks to six straight service points from Kallevig, including an ace.

"I was happy to see the team pull out with the win," Compliment said. "Paola came to play, and they didn't let up all evening. We hadn't been placed in that situation before when we had been down a few sets and had to battle back. I was very glad we didn't completely shut down but found the guts to continue to battle and hold on to the win.

"Overall, we could have played better. We made a few too many mental and communication errors that need to be addressed. We also seemed to have a lack of energy from time to time."