

State for Cate: Team rallies for injured teammate



Senior Cate Stambaugh (left) is helped to the court by teammate Megan Lemke as the rest of the seniors Lauren Dunn, Makenzie Kallevig and Madison Turner come out to receive their substate championship trophy Saturday at Spring Hill High School. Stambaugh suffered a season-ending injury at practice a week ago and the team has rallied around her.

SPRING HILL – With her ankle encased in a large, gray boot, Cate Stambaugh sat and watched Saturday as her Louisburg teammates celebrated their fourth consecutive substate volleyball championship.

It wasn't the easiest of moments for the Lady Cat senior.

For a few seconds, she thought about leaving her chair – boot and all – and running out with her team. Then she had second thoughts.

"I wish I could jump up and scream with the rest of the girls, but I just had to be loud in my sitting position," Stambaugh said.

Stambaugh was put in a tough spot after she injured her ankle in practice a week ago and was told she is done for the season. The Lady Cat middle hitter was among the team leaders

in blocks and played a big role in their success.

When she went down, the rest of the team was stunned.

“When Cate hurt her ankle, the first thing she said to us was that she wasn’t going to be able to play at state, and that was heartbreaking,” senior Lauren Dunn said.

Her injury also tugged on the heart strings of Lady Cat coach Jessica Compliment. Although she was concerned with how the team was going to alter the way they did things, her main focus was with her senior player.

“She has been at practice ever since she has gotten hurt,” Compliment said. “I told her that she is everywhere with us and that we aren’t doing anything without her. Her goal is that since she can’t do anything about it, is that she is just trying to stay positive. She has been helping out with practices, talking with the players and she is a big help.”

Even though she is not on the court, Stambaugh has made an impact on the team in just a week’s time and she is enjoying every minute of it.

“It is really exciting, because this whole week I have become a different part of the team,” Stambaugh said. “I am the eyes and trying to see what we can fix if something doesn’t look right. It is really exciting to see that I can help even though I was in a whole different element.”



Middle hitter Olivia Bradley tips the ball over the net during the substate championship match. Bradley is filling for Stambaugh at the middle spot.

In Stambaugh's absence, there have been a few other players who have had to take on different roles as well, including junior Olivia Bradley and senior Megan Lemke. For both players, the change was different, and a little familiar at the same time.

Bradley moved to Stambaugh's spot in the middle, a position she has played in club ball and at the junior varsity level a year ago.

"I was very nervous coming in because I had big shoes to fill coming in for Cate, but I did the best I could and hopefully everyone else thought so too," Bradley said. "I felt we stepped up a huge amount, especially with learning all the new rotations and how that was going to affect us. We just played the game."

Lemke, who played primarily on the back row for much of the year, also moved to the front row to replace Bradley as one of the team's outside hitters.

"I have always been a hitter throughout much of high school,

but this year we just focused on the back row, because that's what would be best for the team," Lemke said. "I would always practice swinging in practice just in case someone got hurt and unfortunately Cate did. I love hitting and it has been a lot of fun so far. So, it hasn't been a big change for me."

Freshman Anna Dixon has also had to adjust as well as she is being looked to contribute more on the blocking side of things, along with being one the team's top hitters.



Freshman Anna Dixon goes up to block a De Soto kill attempt Saturday during the substate championship match.

"They have asked me to step it up a bit on defense," Dixon said. "Cate was a great blocker and I have had to step it up a bit there. Plus I think I have gotten better on the back row as well because I have never had to play that before."

Now the Lady Cats look on to what they hope is a special week in Salina as they open the Class 4A, Division I state tournament Friday. Louisburg finished fourth a season ago and was runner-up in 2013.

"The state tournament is the most fun thing in my high school career," Stambaugh said. "I am just so excited to go back with all my best friends and make another run at it."

And Stambaugh will be right there with them, cheering them on.