

Opinion: Lady Cat seniors carry on tradition



Louisburg High School seniors (from left) Makenzie Kallevig, Cate Stambaugh, Lauren Dunn, Megan Lemke and Madison Turner share a few tears after they receive the team's third-place trophy Saturday during the Class 4A-Division I state tournament in Salina.

SALINA – As a freshman, Lauren Dunn was all sorts of nervous when she walked onto the state tournament floor the first time.

Madison Turner, Megan Lemke and Makenzie Kallevig probably had the same feelings when they made their first state tournament as sophomores. Cate Stambaugh had some butterflies when she made her state debut last season as a junior.

For these five Louisburg High School seniors, the state tournament has become an expectation and not just a goal of trying to get there. Every season, the Lady Cat leaders have goals of winning state tournaments – a goal they are still trying to achieve as a program.

Dunn, Turner, Lemke, Kallevig and Stambaugh gave it their all in their final go around, but couldn't bring that state title home to Louisburg. It certainly wasn't for a lack of trying.

The Lady Cats took eventual state champion Bishop Miege to three sets in pool play and had a lead against McPherson in the semifinals before falling in two sets. Louisburg eventually beat Tonganoxie on Saturday for third-place.

"I am so proud," Kallevig said. "We had five seniors so we had a lot of fun leading the team through the first match of the year to senior night to substate and now state. We wanted to end our season on a win.

"Getting fourth last season, we wanted to do better than that and we did. Plus I got to finish the season with all my best friends and that was special."

This senior class carried on the traditions that was laid before them under coach Jessica Compliment. It began six years ago when seniors Emily Lemke, Marisa Mackey, Colleen O'Brien and Caitlin Schneider broke through to qualify for the first state tournament under Compliment in 2010. It was the first time the program had been to state in 18 years.

After not qualifying in 2011, the Lady Cats used that state experience to get back the next four years and would place every year. In 2012, seniors Regan Wertz, Bailey Aiken, Katie Dixon, Amy Dennis and Anna Bell put together a strong performance to finish fourth.

The following year, seniors Maddie DeShazer and Ellie Walter helped the Lady Cats to the state championship game and placed second. In 2014, Bailey Dvorak and Sydney Dixon helped guide Louisburg to a fourth-place finish as well.

If you want to go back even further, Louisburg's tradition was first started under hall of fame coach Larry Harding in the 1970s and 80s, who guided the Lady Cats to nine state tournaments, including several top four finishes.



Sophomore Sophie McMullen jumps in the air with excitement as she gathers around teammates (from left) Madison Turner, Megan Lemke, Makenzie Kallevig, Lauren Dunn and Anna Dixon on Friday at the state tournament in Salina

It is hard to win state championships, especially if you are a public school like Louisburg.

Certain schools have advantages Louisburg can't compete against, or others just have the better team that year. This run of state tournaments is something the school and the community should be proud of because nothing is guaranteed.

Not many schools their size, public ones anyway, can match the success the Lady Cats have achieved in their program's history. Past and present Lady Cats should hold their heads high for everything they have accomplished.

It is all about handing the baton from one class to the next and this year's senior class did a great job of preparing the underclassmen for what they can expect.

All five seniors played vital roles on this year's team and meshed well with a great setter in sophomore Sophie McMullen,

a fantastic hitter in freshman Anna Dixon and junior outside hitter Olivia Bradley, who played in a couple different spots for the Lady Cats and did them well.

"It was an easy transition," Anna Dixon said. "I was so happy to play with this group of seniors and I am going to miss them a lot next year. I felt pushed a lot to do better and those upperclassmen were a big reason I was able to improve this year."

It was Bradley who stepped in for Stambaugh after she injured her ankle toward the end of the season and moved to the middle hitter spot.

"Olivia did such a good job in my spot and maybe even better than I could have done," Stambaugh said. "I was just glad to end on a win because that is what our team deserves. We work together and we have worked too hard to end on a loss."

Louisburg ended its state tournament with a win Saturday for the first time in these five appearances and the emotions were bittersweet. It was especially hard for Dunn, who stepped onto the floor at the state tournament for the first time in 2012 as a freshman with a core of five seniors similar to her group this season. Since then, she has been named to two state all-tournament teams.

"The whole season has been so fun," Dunn said. "All the underclassmen and all the players have been so great. It is a great group of girls and I am going to miss being a Louisburg Wildcat.

"It is has been an awesome experience to be here four times. It is just sad that it has to end."

Lauren, Madison, Megan, Makenzie and Cate showed the underclassmen the blueprint for what it takes to have success and now it is their job to add to it

"We have set the bar for the underclassmen for leadership and how we play the game," Megan said. "I would say Louisburg volleyball has a good future."

That it does.