

Louisburg volleyball reloads following big season



Junior Sophie McMullen (left) sets up teammate Olivia Bradley during the state tournament last season. McMullen, Bradley and Anna Dixon are the three returning varsity players that return from last year's third-place team at state.

Five out of the last six years, the Louisburg High School volleyball team has seen its season come to a close at the Class 4A-Division I Tournament in Salina.

Not a bad place for it to end.

However, this season the Lady Cats will have a different look to as they graduated five varsity players off last season's team that finished third at state. It is not exactly a recipe to return to a state tournament, but three players are looking to lead the way to make sure they make another trip to Salina.

Senior Olivia Bradley (middle blocker), junior Sophie McMullen (setter) and sophomore Anna Dixon (outside hitter) return with varsity experience as head coach Jessica Compliment tries to mold the team around them – a team that has won three Frontier League titles in a row.

"We did lose a large chunk of our team from last year, so we have a lot of rebuilding to do," Compliment said. "Not only did we lose five starters, but three of those players started

for the past three years so we also lost a lot of experience. Sophie is returning with the most varsity experience having two years of varsity under her belt.



Sophomore Anna Dixon returns as one of the Lady Cats' top hitters after earning all-league honors last season.

"She, along with Anna and Olivia, will need to step up this year and use their varsity experience to help lead the team. We have a young group of players who are thirsty to learn and ready for the challenge."

The Lady Cats, who finished with a 31-12 record a year ago, will not only have a different look roster-wise, but will have a different offense as well.

Louisburg plans to run a 6-2 offense, which would split the setting duties between McMullen and sophomore Carson Buffington and allow McMullen to hit some on the front row. McMullen, who was an honorable mention all-league setter in 2015, has started in that spot the last two seasons.

"I think it gives us the best chance to be competitive in all six rotations," Compliment said." I stress to the players at a young age to not settle in to just one position early because a versatile player can be very vital to a team. We have a few players that can play multiple positions and play them well. Sophie is one of those athletes. Sophie has a lot of experience at both setting and hitting. I'm excited to see what she brings to the team and season this year."

Whether it is Buffington or McMullen, both setters will look to get Dixon involved in the offense. Dixon earned second-team all-Frontier League honors as a freshman and was second on the team last season with more than 300 kills and also had 59 aces.

Dixon will be joined by junior Mikayla Quinn, who will hit on the right side, and Bradley in the middle.

"I've seen a growth of maturity from Anna so far this season, and I expect her to have another good year," Compliment said. "She'll need to use some of her experience to help lead the team as well."

Bradley will join Ellie Katzer and Tayler Lancaster – a transfer from Drexel, Mo. – as the lone seniors this season and both Katzer and Lancaster look to see time on the back row.

The Lady Cats will also feature a few new players, although the names might not be all that new. Freshmen Haley Cain and Riley Kallevig will also play big parts in Louisburg's rotation.

Kallevig will serve as the team's libero and will take over the same spot as her sister Makenzie, who was a senior last season. Cain also earned a spot as the team's middle hitter.

Compliment hopes the two freshmen and Quinn can help fill some holes left by last season's graduating class.

"We'll look to Mikayla to be a strong front row player both offensively and defensively," Compliment said. "Haley and Riley are two freshmen who are also starting this year. They both put in a lot of work over the summer and earned their way to a starting position during tryouts."

Louisburg won't have to wait too long to get going as it opens its season Saturday when the Lady Cats travel to Baldwin for the Preseason Frontier League Tournament. Pool play is set to begin at 8 a.m.

"We are a mix of a young and veteran team this season so there may be some growing pains along the way," Compliment said. "We'll take each match each week and learn and grow from each experience. Hopefully by the end of the season we will be playing at the top of the game and competing to finish out another league title and a chance to compete at state. Half of the team made the trip to state last year, so they do understand the work that goes behind reaching that goal."

"Each year the players understand that the stakes get higher and that they need to continue to work to get better. We cannot become complacent and just expect wins to happen. We have to work harder than the other teams."