

# Louisburg volleyball ready to 'Believe the Hype'



Louisburg senior Sophie McMullen digs up a ball during a match last season. McMullen who earned first-team all-Frontier League honors along with junior teammate Anna Dixon, return to lead the Lady Cats.

The image is still planted in the minds of the Louisburg High School volleyball team.

It is a picture the Lady Cats haven't been able to shake almost 10 months later as they watched rival Paola celebrate a substate championship on their home floor after losing the match in two sets.

However, instead of letting that one match do more damage, the Lady Cats are trying to turn it into a positive. Louisburg, which opens its season Saturday when it hosts the Frontier League Tournament, wants to make sure it doesn't have that same sinking feeling at the end of this year.

"I think it has motivated us a lot, especially seeing teams ahead of us go to state," junior Anna Dixon said. "We were super motivated going into that game, but the loss I think really hit us hard. Our new motto this year is 'Believe the Hype.' I really think this is going to be our bounce back year and I think that we are ready to go."

That new motto is something Louisburg head coach Jessica Compliment believes will give her team confidence – something that wasn't there at times last season.

“Louisburg volleyball has a long standing tradition of being a strong athletic program,” Compliment said. “League championships, state qualifying teams and state rankings date all the way back to the 1970s. Wearing a Louisburg uniform is something that should bring pride to the athlete because they are part of a program with a rich history and a program with recent successes.

“‘Believe the Hype’ hopefully brings confidence to the athletes that they are deserving of wearing that uniform. Last year I think we were missing that confidence. We didn't quite believe that we could beat or play with anyone if we put our mind to it and worked together as a team.”

People around the state are starting to “Believe the Hype” as well as the Kansas Volleyball Coaches Association tabbed the Lady Cats as the No. 3 team in Class 4A-Division I in its preseason rankings, just below No. 1 Rose Hill and No. 2 Bishop Miege.

Louisburg returns six players that saw starting time at one point or another last year during its 23-17 season. Dixon and senior Sophie McMullen return to lead the Lady Cats as both players earned all-Frontier League first team honors in 2016.

Dixon, a Kansas State commit, led the Lady Cats as a sophomore with more than 500 kills and 160 blocks. McMullen, a Northwest Missouri State commit, still had a strong season despite missing some of the year with an injury. She had a team-high 58 aces on the year and had nearly 300 kills to go along with more than 200 digs and assists.

“It's always nice to have seasoned players returning,” Compliment said of Dixon and McMullen. “They both have a lot of experience, and I'll be looking to them to lead the team.

Sophie is a versatile player and has experience playing every position. It will be a different position for her on our team, but it's a position she's confident and comfortable playing."



**Setter Carson Buffington (middle) returns and will help set up Haley Cain (left), Anna Dixon and the rest of her teammates.**

McMullen, who was the team's full-time setter her first two seasons, shared setting duties last season with Carson Buffington. Now heading into this year, McMullen will serve as an all-around player as the setting duties will fall to Buffington.

Louisburg will revert back to a 5-1 offense, which have just one setter and it will give Buffington that role full-time after a good season as a sophomore.

“This year we have a little more of that chemistry that maybe a new team wouldn’t have,” McMullen said. “I think we are all used to each other now. Anna can hit off Carson, I can hit off Carson and Carson is used to our passes now. I think it all kind of clicks more now than it did when we had new players last year.

“I am excited about the new position because that is what I will be doing in college. I miss setting, because that was my favorite, but I really love to hit and pass just as much.”

Sophomore Haley Cain and senior Mikayla Quinn also return after having big roles on the Lady Cats a season ago as both players will play on the front row, along with sophomore Erin Lemke and senior Sarah Wilson, who will move up to the varsity level.

Defensively, sophomore Riley Kallevig returns as the team’s libero and fellow sophomore Reilly Ratliff-Becher has also moved up to varsity in the defensive rotation with senior Ainsley Vance.

“Despite having six returning starters, I feel like we are still a young team,” Compliment said. “We are taking each day at a time, and making the most of each practice. The team is focused on getting better each day and each match at a time. The team has their sight set on winning league and qualifying for state, but they also understand that nothing will come easy. We have a tough schedule but one that will help prepare us for post season.”

Their schedule may be tough, but the Lady Cats will get to play a bulk of their games on their home floor. Louisburg will host two tournaments this season to go along with eight duals, a triangular and a quadrangular.

The Lady Cats have just five away dates on their schedule and they hope it gives them an advantage throughout the season.

"It is awesome," Dixon said of the home schedule. "Last year I really think our crowd stepped up a lot and they made a huge difference in a lot of our wins because the game is so mental. A big crowd can be a difference, so hopefully that can give us a couple more wins."

Louisburg starts its home schedule Saturday when it hosts the Frontier League Tournament. Pool play will begin at 8 a.m. and the Lady Cats will start play at the high school.

The top two teams in each pool will advance to the championship bracket later in the day.

The Lady Cats open play against Baldwin to start off, followed by matches against Spring Hill and Paola to end the pool. De Soto, Eudora, Ottawa and Basehor-Linwood will compete in pool play at the middle school.