

Lady Cats knock off No. 2 Olathe North in thriller



Louisburg senior Sophie McMullen goes up for one of her 18 kills on the night Thursday against Olathe North in Louisburg. The Lady Cats downed Olathe North 3-2, including a 21-19 win in the fifth set.

In the final moments of the fifth set against Olathe North, the Louisburg High School volleyball team gave it all it had.

The Lady Cats swung a little harder, served a little better and dove on the floor to dig up everything they could get their hands on. They needed every ounce of energy as they tried to knock off the No. 2 team in Class 6A.

As it turned out, the Lady Cats had enough to get the job done.

Louisburg had match point on seven different occasions, but couldn't put it away until Riley Kallevig dug up the Olathe North hit, Carson Buffington put the pass in the air and Anna Dixon smacked a kill to capture the fifth set, 21-19, and won the match 3-2.

The Lady Cats, ranked No. 2 in Class 4A-Division I, left the floor knowing this win can be the springboard they need to even bigger things.

"We were really tired," Dixon said of the final moments of the

match. "This whole week in practice we have been working on giving effort on every play, being competitive and it definitely showed out here. We are really excited to bring that into sub-state next weekend."

Getting going certainly wasn't a problem for Louisburg (24-6) as it jumped to a 25-23 and 25-22 victory in the first two sets and was one win from putting Olathe North away. Louisburg had a lead over the Eagles in the third set, but Olathe North rallied to win the third 25-21 and jumped out to a big advantage and held on to win the fourth, 25-23, despite a late Lady Cat rally.

All that set up a dramatic fifth game – one that saw Louisburg down 5-1 to start the first-to-15 set

"We had a lot of fight left," Dixon said. "We called a timeout and we said we could decide now if we want to win or if we are going to let them take control. We came back out, gave 100 percent and we were able to pull it out."



Louisburg players (from left) Anna Dixon, Haley Cain,

Riley Kallevig, Carson Buffington, Sophie McMullen and Reilly Ratliff-Becher celebrate a big point Thursday against Olathe North.

Louisburg eventually rallied to tie the match, then took the lead late thanks to the Lady Cats' defense as they dug up several Olathe North kill attempts.

"It was a battle of wills there at the end and that is what it came down to," Louisburg coach Jessica Compliment said. "We have been working a lot on defense in practice and we talk about sacrificing yourself and going for every ball and leaving it on the court. It showed out there.

"Our back row defense was great. We were running balls down and getting touches on everything. It might not have been the prettiest pass, but we were going to get a touch on that ball if we could. Our defense really stepped up and played huge for us."

Senior Sophie McMullen, Dixon, Buffington and sophomores Kallevig and Reilly Ratliff-Becher all came up with several big digs defensively in the match, especially in the fifth set. McMullen had a team-high 27 digs, while Kallevig, the team's libero, finished with 20. Dixon added 19 digs, while Buffington and Ratliff-Becher each had 17.

McMullen also thrived from behind the service line as she notched seven of the team's 13 aces on the night, Kallevig and sophomore Haley Cain had three and two aces, respectively.

At the net, no one had a busier night than Dixon and she was able to come through for the Lady Cats. The Kansas State commit recorded a team-high 29 kills in the five sets and McMullen responded with 18 of her own.



Haley Cain (left) and Anna Dixon go up for a block on an Olathe North player Thursday.

Buffington, the team's setter, set up a lot of those attempts as she finished with 49 assists and ran all over the floor to get the offense started.

Still, as busy as Dixon and McMullen were, Louisburg had other players step up and come through with crucial plays. Cain, who finished with six kills, began the fifth set and with a strong kill, while seniors Mikayla Quinn and Sarah Wilson both had crucial blocks.

"They showed a lot," Compliment said of her players. "Haley had a big kill to open that fifth set. Having a big kill coming from her was a big boost for us. She has played well for us all season, but that was the first time she really hit the ball hard. That just amps the enthusiasm for everyone on the team. A lot of the girls made some big plays, which took

some pressure off Anna and Sophie, so that way their defense can't just focus on those two.

"Sarah has been battling for playing time all season and she came in and had a couple big plays for us. I was proud to see her make those. Reilly and Riley came up with some huge digs as well. Olathe North has some big outside hitters, and a lot of those hits would go cross court to Kallevig and she was getting good touches on everything. Anna and Sophie both had big digs on the back row, and Mikayla had some big blocks, so it was nice to see it all the come together."



Sophomore libero Riley Kallevig digs up a ball late in the match Thursday against Olathe North.

Those plays were just a few the Lady Cats had to make with the match on the line.

"We really showed heart there at the end," McMullen said. "I have never seen a team fight so hard to get those points. We were just going balls to wall there. We just wanted to make sure we got a touch on everything. We have been working on getting to every ball and I think it really showed out there, especially in that fifth set."

Louisburg will try and continue its winning ways Saturday when it travels to the Emporia Invitational. That will follow a senior night dual with Ottawa on Tuesday, followed by the sub-state tournament next weekend.

"We are super focused," Dixon said. "Everything in practice has been directed toward sub-state and what we need to work on. Our defense has really picked it up lately. Defense is what wins games, so hopefully we can pull it out next weekend."

LOUISBURG GETS ROAD WIN AT EUDORA

Before its big match with state-ranked Olathe North and the Emporia Invitational on Saturday, the Louisburg volleyball team first had to get by Eudora on Tuesday in a Frontier League dual.

The Lady Cats were able to get a 25-21, 25-19 and 26-24 victory at Eudora High School, but they didn't do it in the way they would have liked.

"We just didn't play with a lot of focus," Louisburg coach Jessica Compliment said. "I could tell the girls were distracted. They weren't focused on the court and we made a lot of serving and passing errors. We just weren't communicating and those are simple focus problems and the girls knew it the next day in practice."

"Still, they made the plays when they needed to make them."

They were able to finish the game out and I told them that we were not going to go four and we were going to win it in three. We needed to play to win and I think we did that.”

Senior Sophie McMullen led the Wildcat attack with 14 kills, while junior teammate Anna Dixon added 12. Junior Carson Buffington also notched 26 assists as she ran the Lady Cat offense.

Louisburg also recorded eight aces from behind the service line as Dixon tallied three aces, while sophomores Reilly Ratliff-Becher and Haley Cain finished with two.

Defensively, McMullen had a big night from the back row with a team-high 18 digs, while Dixon and sophomore libero Riley Kallevig each finished with seven. Ratliff-Becher added six digs in the win.