

Lady Cats' title quest comes up short in finals match



Senior Sophie McMullen holds up the Class 4A-D1 state runner-up trophy as the team gathers together following the Lady Cats' three set loss to Rose Hill in the finals match Saturday in Salina.

SALINA – The Louisburg High School volleyball team hoisted a state trophy Saturday during the Kansas Class 4A-Division 1 State Volleyball Championships.

It just wasn't the one the Lady Cats wanted.

Louisburg advanced to the championship match against Rose Hill, and after the two teams split the first two sets, they provided the fans with an intense, and decisive, third set.

In the end, the Lady Cats made just one more mistake in the 23-25, 25-10 and 29-27 loss to the Rockets and finished as the state runner-up. Both teams went back and forth at each other, with both defenses digging most everything up, but Rose Hill won the final two points to pull out the thriller in Salina.

"It has been extremely difficult to handle this loss," Louisburg junior Anna Dixon said. "I have played a lot of games over the years and lost many important games, but this was definitely the hardest for me, because it was so close and we ended it on our own unforced errors."

The end of the match saw the Rose Hill players storm the court as they secured their second straight state title. At the same time, the Louisburg players tried to fight back a wave of emotions that came flooding up as they came just short of winning the school's first volleyball state title.

"There were a lot of tears," Louisburg coach Jessica Compliment said. "The players were crushed at first. They set their goals high and were disappointed to come so close to the elusive first place at the state tournament. Both teams did leave it all out there on the floor, and that is what I told the girls they had to do. Rose Hill played great defense on Saturday. Their libero was picking up everything."



Senior Mikayla Quinn gives coach Jessica Compliment a long hug after receiving her second place state medal Saturday in Salina.

Louisburg, which defeated Rose Hill in two sets during pool play Friday, saw a different team in the state championship. Despite that, the Lady Cats got off to a strong start Saturday as they jumped out to a 14-9 lead in the first set thanks to a pair of kills from senior Sophie McMullen, another kill from Haley Cain and an ace from Reilly Ratliff-Becher.

Although Rose Hill cut it to two late, McMullen reeled off three kills down the stretch to secure the first set win. The Rockets came out on fire to win the second going away, which set up the dramatic third set.

Rose Hill took the lead and held it halfway through, until Dixon recorded a pair of kills to give Louisburg a brief 14-13 lead. The Rockets battled back and took a 20-18 lead late and Compliment called a timeout to calm her team down.

It seemed to work as the Lady Cats went on a 5-0 run to take a 23-20 lead behind kills from McMullen and Cain. The state title was within their reach, but Rose Hill didn't give up as it scored a quick three points to tie the match.

Cain responded with a kill to put Louisburg up 24-23 and set up match point. The Rockets defense held firm and tied it back up. Dixon gave Louisburg the lead back with a tip and another match point, but instead, Rose Hill scored the next two to set up match point for itself.

Louisburg tied it up at 26-all and Dixon followed with a block for a 27-26 advantage for Louisburg. Rose Hill called a timeout, and it seemed to be just what the Rockets needed as they scored three straight points to win the match and the state championship.



Setter Carson Buffington tips the ball over a pair of Rose Hill blockers.

"It has been tough to finally come to realization about the loss," McMullen said. "I think that overall we played better than we would have ever imagined and I'm proud to go out like that, especially with second place.

"Although it does still replay in my mind thinking what I could have done better for my team, and in all honesty it was probably my missed serve. Ultimately, there is nothing more that we could have done. I think Rose Hill just had a few little things that we didn't."

Dixon and McMullen provided the Lady Cats with a lot of offense at the net with 20 and 13 kills, respectively. Cain also added six kills of her own and senior Mikayla Quinn had two.

Junior setter Carson Buffington was busy as she tallied 34 assists to set up her four hitters.

The Rose Hill defense made an adjustment on both Dixon and McMullen as the Rockets tried to make it more difficult for the Lady Cat players to hit over them.

“They shifted after the first set which really challenged Anna and I,” McMullen said. “They made it to where we had to hit over a 6-foot blocker, which was very challenging. It was very difficult, yet that’s just what we will see as we both continue off to college, so it was a little eye opening. Of course, we were frustrated but that just made us realize that we can’t just hit it straight down.”

Defensively, the Lady Cats put together one of their better performances of the season as they turned away several Rose Hill attacks and had four players with double-digit dig numbers.



Libero Riley Kallevig digs up a ball against Rose Hill on Saturday during the state championship match.

Sophomore libero Riley Kallevig was one of those as she had a team-high 20 digs along with Dixon. McMullen finished with 15 digs, while Ratliff-Becher added 10 of her own.

The defense was one of the reasons the Lady Cats had match point three times late in the third set.

“The final points of the game were insane,” Dixon said. “Their defense dug everything and so did ours. I never thought the game was going to end. What the game finally came down to was mistakes. That’s what volleyball is, a game of mistakes, but unfortunately it was our side of the net that made the mental mistakes that cannot happen in a time like that. It happens with every team, but we gave it our all and worked our tails off. I am very proud of our team and cannot wait to come out and try to get that state title next season.”

To get to that position, the Lady Cats put together some of their best volleyball of the season as they went 3-0 in pool play Friday to secure a spot in the state semifinals.



Sophie McMullen puts down a kill against Rose Hill in the state championship match Saturday in Salina.

Louisburg opened with a 25-16, 25-16 win over Basehor-Linwood and then followed it up with big 13-25, 25-19, 25-19 win over Bishop Miege. With the victory, the Lady Cats qualified to play the next day, but didn't let up as it beat Rose Hill in two sets, 25-15 and 25-22.

However, it was the win against Miege, a perennial state power, that took the Lady Cats' confidence to another level.

"The win against Miege was straight heart," McMullen said. "After the first set, and me hitting my head, I think a few got nervous and lost hope, but that didn't stop us. We fought

till the very end and pulled it out. The win definitely gave us the confidence to move on to Rose Hill and it showed as we crushed them on the first day. Our confidence was at an all-time high as we ended our first day, which was an amazing feeling.”



Junior Anna Dixon skies for a kill Saturday against Rose Hill.

Dixon led the way with a team-high 20 kills and McMullen finished with 14 in the Miego match, but it was the emergence of Cain, the team’s middle hitter, that helped put Louisburg over the top as she added seven kills and provided another option for Buffington to set to.

“Haley had a good tournament,” Compliment said. “She made some big plays at crucial times on both Friday and Saturday. She also made some big plays in the back row when she was in

serving. She is pretty consistent and always keeps a level head. I'm excited to see what the next two seasons will bring for her."

Defense was also big for Louisburg against Miego as McMullen and Kallevig led the Lady Cats with 17 and 15 digs, respectively, and Buffington added 12. Dixon and Quinn were also big at the net with five and three blocks, respectively.

Serving was key for Louisburg in its first match against Rose Hill as it recorded nine aces and all of them came from Dixon and McMullen. Dixon led with five aces and McMullen had four.



Sophomore Haley Cain goes up for a kill against Wellington in the state semifinals match.

To start the day Saturday, the Lady Cats had an easy time with Wellington in the state semifinals as they notched a 25-11, 25-17 win to set up the rematch with Rose Hill.

The Lady Cats ended their season with a 34-10 record and they realize, despite the loss, that it was a season to remember.

“As I told the team, you can’t let one match define an entire season,” Compliment said. “I needed reminding of that as well because it’s very easy to focus on that last match, on the last set and forget about all of the accomplishments throughout the entire season. To go 34-10 and second in the state is something the team should be proud of. I think after they had time to process the loss, they realized how great the season was. They played really well all season as a team, and continued to grow as a team and as individuals throughout the season.”



Members of the Louisburg High School state runner-up volleyball team are (front row, from left): Sarah Wilson, Ainsley Vance, Sophie McMullen, Mikayla Quinn; (back row) assistant coach Leanna Willer, assistant coach Mary Quinn, Riley Kallevig, Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Makenna Allen, Erin Lemke, Anna Dixon, Carson Buffington, Haley

Cain and Riley Vohs.

The players also enjoyed the journey that began with a loss in the sub-state tournament a year ago.

“Our season was a winning season,” McMullen said. “Looking back on my four years of playing, this was the best season so far. We ended at 34-10, which is better than many others. Although last year we didn’t go to state, it made the team as whole want to win this year and gave us the determination and the goal that we wanted to achieve this year. We may not have won it all, but we sure made history and proved to ourselves that the sky is the limit and we can achieve anything with hard work and heart.”