

Former Lady Cat volleyball players thriving at collegiate level



Former Louisburg High School volleyball players (from left) Bailey Dvorak, Lauren Dunn, Madison Turner, Sophie McMullen and Sydney Dixon have either had a lot of success on the collegiate level or are just getting started following strong careers with the Lady Cats.

Louisburg High School volleyball has certainly had a run to remember in recent years.

The Lady Cats advanced to the state tournament five of the last six seasons and have finished runner-up on two occasions. Louisburg has also recorded third and fourth-place finishes along the way.

In a program that has a history filled with state tournament appearances and top four placings, Louisburg has had several good players that were big contributors in that run.

Now those same players are either currently making an impact on the collegiate level, or are about to make their mark.

Sydney Dixon (Fort Hays State), Bailey Dvorak (Lindenwood), Madison Turner (Arkansas State), Lauren Dunn (Pittsburg State) and Sophie McMullen (Northwest Missouri State) are all former

LHS players that have gone on to play Division II level volleyball or higher.

Each player has a different journey that led them to their respective destinations, but the one thing they have all in common is they helped Louisburg volleyball continue its strong tradition. Now they are trying to do the same thing in college.

SYDNEY DIXON

Volleyball has always been in Sydney Dixon's blood.

Her mother Beth, and aunt Amy, are both currently in the LHS Hall of Fame and both went on to play college volleyball themselves. Like many other college volleyball players, Sydney grew up on the sport.

In high school, she helped lead Louisburg to a second place state finish in 2013 and the outside hitter eventually signed on with Fort Hays State – a Division II program in the MIAA.

Although some players take a while to get acclimated in the collegiate level, Dixon made her mark on the program as a freshman in 2015. She earned honorable mention All-MIAA honors as an outside hitter as she finished with 190 kills, which was fourth on the team.

“College volleyball is a different world for sure,” Dixon said. “It is more of a job than it is in high school and really was a huge change for me. But I got to know a lot of different players and developed a lot more relationships along the way and the experience was a great.”

Her success as a freshman gave her more playing time as a sophomore as she made 22 starts and finished with 173 kills and had six double-figure kill matches, including 16 against

Missouri Western.



Photo courtesy of Ryan Prickett / Fort Hays State
Sydney Dixon played for three seasons with the Fort Hays State volleyball team.

“My sophomore season was probably the most memorable for me because the team was doing so well and the team had such good chemistry,” Dixon said. “It was a good squad and I just remember the energy surrounding the team and we were able to win some big matches.”

Dixon was on pace to have a career year as a junior in 2017 as she racked up 185 kills through just 24 matches, including a 17 kill performance against West Liberty. Unfortunately, a knee injury derailed the rest of her season.

As she went up at the net, Dixon felt her knee start to buckle and had to take herself out. It turned out that she had a 60 percent tear in the patella tendon in her knee and had to have

knee surgery in the offseason.

That injury also forced Dixon to make a tough decision as she decided to say goodbye to the sport she loved a year earlier than she had hoped.

“It was hard, so hard,” Dixon said. “They said if I didn’t have surgery that the tendon could completely rupture and obviously I didn’t want to take that chance. I just love the sport so much. I don’t regret anything though. I loved playing here and I have met so many great people. Playing college volleyball was a rewarding experience for me and one that I don’t regret.”

Dixon will graduate with a degree in exercise science in December and did work in the classroom after earning a spot on the MIAA Academic Honor Roll each of the last three years.

She also hasn’t left volleyball behind either and is still involved in the Fort Hays program as a student assistant coach.

“I am not sure exactly what I want to do after I graduate, but the one thing I do know is that I want to coach either on the club or high school level,” Dixon said. “I had the chance to coach a club team earlier and I thought it was a great experience. I just want the opportunity to be able to teach and help others. It was very rewarding for me.”

BAILEY DVORAK

When Bailey Dvorak accepted the opportunity to play college volleyball at Lindenwood University, she wasn’t quite sure what to expect.

The transition from high school to college volleyball was a big one, and for the 2015 Louisburg High School graduate, it

seemed to be an easy one on the court.

Dvorak made a big impact with the Division II Lions as a freshman as she earned second-team All-MIAA honors as an outside hitter. She played in 30 matches and started in 22 of them and led the Lindenwood team with 290 kills, including a season-best 19 kills against Central Oklahoma.

She also thrived in the classroom as Dvorak earned the MIAA Scholar Athlete Award.

“My experience at Lindenwood has been great,” Dvorak said. “I love the area and the people that I have met. Lindenwood has over 50 sports teams so that brings in a lot of diversity to the school and it has introduced me to people from all over the world. I am happy that I chose to come to Lindenwood to play volleyball. The program has really changed these last few years and I am thankful to be a part of that.”

As a junior, Dvorak had another solid season for Lindenwood as she played in 29 matches and recorded 176 kills as the Lions finished with a 20-13 record and an 11-7 mark in the MIAA.



Photo courtesy of Lindenwood University Lousiburg grad Bailey Dvorak is off to a strong start to her senior season with Lindenwood.

In her final season with the Lions, the team is picked to finish seventh in the MIAA, but they are already off to a strong start after winning their home invitational. Dvorak was a big factor for Lindenwood and was named to the all-tournament team for her efforts.

“It is a little bittersweet because I love my teammates and how much the program has changed,” Dvorak said of her final season of volleyball. “I wish I could play a few more seasons

with my coaches and continue to compete in the MIAA. My expectations this year is for us to compete and win.

“We have a pretty solid group of freshmen and quite a few returners that make practices very competitive and my hope is to do well this year so we will have a higher ranking next fall.”

She also has one more opportunity to compete against some of her former Louisburg teammates. Dvorak will face off with Lauren Dunn (Pitt State) and Sophie McMullen (Northwest) later this season and also ran up against Sydney Dixon in prior seasons.

“It has been pretty fun playing against them these last few years,” Dvorak said. “I am glad that all of us were able to compete at the highest level we could. Playing against my old teammates has made me realize how much talent we had during high school. I am thankful that Coach (Jessica Compliment) brought us together on the court and I think that she has done a great job building up the program.”

Dvorak is also excelling on the academic side as well. She will graduate with a major in psychology and a minor in sociology next May.

LAUREN DUNN

Lauren Dunn had her fair share of success during her time with the Louisburg volleyball program.

Dunn was a part of a senior class that helped the Lady Cats to four straight state tournament appearances and placed in the top four each year. She amassed more than 500 kills in her final two seasons and earned all-league and all-state recognition her senior year.

It was a fun four years for Dunn, and it was that time that helped her take that next step – collegiate volleyball.

Dunn signed on with Pittsburg State and the 2016 Louisburg High School graduate has made the most of her time with the Gorillas as she saw playing time as a freshman.

“My experience at Pitt has been amazing,” Dunn said. “The coaches, teachers and community are all on your side to help you, especially student athletes. It reminds me of small town Louisburg, so it felt like home as soon as I got here. As far as the transition, I think that’s what helped me, as well as having a very supportive team and family to help out whenever I needed them.”

Now entering her junior season with the program, Dunn has accomplished a lot since her arrival two years ago.

As a freshman, Dunn played in 19 matches and started in four as a defensive specialist. She had a team-high 15 digs against Northwest Missouri State that year and averaged close to two digs per set.



Photo courtesy of Pittsburg State University
Louisburg grad Lauren Dunn is entering her third season with the Pittsburg State volleyball program.

In her sophomore season, Dunn played in 30 matches and started 10 of those. She averaged close to 3 digs per set and had one of her best game's against Sydney Dixon's Fort Hays State team when she tallied 26 digs in the match.

At first it was a little different to play against Dixon or Bailey Dvorak's Lindenwood squad as they are all in the MIAA Conference, but Dunn enjoys the competition and a chance to get to reunite with her former teammates.

"Playing against Syd and Bailey is always fun," Dunn said. "Being past teammates, it's almost sad that we can't play together anymore, but it leads to more competition against them because it's kind of battle of Louisburg as well as our college team.

“After the games we always go say hi and see how everyone is doing and check up on them. With Sophie playing this year it will be interesting how she fits into her team (Northwest Missouri) and get to see another familiar face on the other side of the net.”

Pittsburg State, which was picked to finish eighth in the MIAA this year, is off to a good start as is Dunn. The Gorillas won seven of their first nine matches to begin the season and won the Christian Brothers Invitational title, in which Dunn was named to the all-tournament team.

So far this season, Dunn has racked up 154 digs on the year to go along with 21 aces.

Along with her success on the court, Dunn is also winning the classroom. She is a member of the MIAA Academic Honor Roll and currently has a 3.65 GPA as a nursing major.

Dunn realizes she has accomplished a lot so far during her time at Pittsburg State, but the program she came from, along with hard work, helped her get to this point.

“The MIAA is a hard conference and having 4 ex-Louisburg volleyball players playing in it says a lot about the Louisburg program,” Dunn said. “Also, the fact that Madison (Turner) is playing D1 at Arkansas State and Anna Dixon being committed to play at K-State is awesome. A lot of talent comes out of Louisburg and it’s because of all the time athletes put in during the season and in the off season. It also helps to have so much support from the whole town.”

MADISON TURNER

During her time at Louisburg, Madison Turner seemed to stand out among the rest when it came to volleyball and for good reason.

Turner, who stands at 6 feet, 4 inches, was a force at the net for the Lady Cat program as she led the team in blocks (266) and kills (327) her senior season in which the Lady Cats finished third at state in 2015. She was also a part of a senior class with Lauren Dunn that helped Louisburg to four state tournament appearances.

All that success brought her all-Frontier League and all-state honors, which eventually catapulted her to Division I volleyball when she signed with Arkansas State. Turner, who graduated from Louisburg High School in 2016, has enjoyed her time with the Red Wolves program.

“My time at Arkansas State has been really good for me because it has pushed me in everything that I do,” Turner said. “Playing Division I volleyball and have school on top of that requires a lot of hard work and discipline. I still have a lot of fun being around my teammates and even meeting people in the community has been a great experience for me so far.”

Turner’s time at Arkansas State has had its challenges as she has had to deal with injuries that has limited her playing time.

As a freshman, Turner didn’t see the court, but she changed all that in 2017 where she played in 11 matches and totaled 42 kills and 23 blocks. She had a career-best 11 kills against Little Rock and a career high six blocks against Troy in the first round of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament.

Playing volleyball in college is a challenge for a lot of athletes around the country, but one that Turner enjoys, despite dealing with nagging injuries from time to time.

“I’ve had to deal with a lot of injuries throughout my college career,” she said. “I try not to let the pain keep me from playing and I do my best to push through it so that I don’t have to miss matches.

“College volleyball is very different than high school because it requires a much higher commitment. It requires you to have better management skills because you have to travel a lot and still do academics on the road, which can be hard at times. The game is also much more competitive because everyone on your team, and the teams you play against are just as committed as you are and want to compete at this high level.”



Photo

courtesy Arkansas State

Madison Turner is hoping for a big junior season for the Arkansas State volleyball program.

So far this season, Turner has seen a lot of playing time with Arkansas State. Through six matches, she has played in 18 sets and recorded 20 kills and 14 blocks as the team's middle blocker.

The Red Wolves are 2-4 to start the season and have wins over Arkansas Pine-Bluff and Memphis.

“I have high expectations for myself to be the best I can be to finish out my career,” Turner said. “I have had a lot of injuries which has been tough, but it has made me grow as a player because I push through it all so that I can keep playing volleyball.”

Turner, who is currently majoring in accounting, is also thankful for being a part of Louisburg program that has sent so much talent to the collegiate level.

“I think it proves that even small programs like Louisburg can produce talent through hard work and dedication,” she said. “It isn’t all about being known in a big program.”

SOPHIE MCMULLEN

In her final season with the Louisburg High School volleyball team, McMullen and the rest of the Lady Cats nearly pulled off the best finish in program history.

The Lady Cats lost a close match to Rose Hill in the Class 4A-Division I state championship in 2017 and eventually settled for second place. Once the season was complete, honors starting rolling in for McMullen as she was a first team All-Frontier League and all-state selection.

She had a busy career in which she was a four-year varsity player and helped the Lady Cats to three state tournaments. McMullen compiled some lofty stats during that time in which she finished with 1,141 digs, 783 kills and 272 aces.

That success eventually sent McMullen to Northwest Missouri State, where she is just beginning her collegiate career.

“The season is going great,” McMullen said. “We have gotten

into a schedule where we are practicing every day and lifting Monday and Wednesdays. We are getting into the real swing of things and focusing a lot on technique and the little things.

“I just love it here. The atmosphere is amazing and so are the girls. Coming from the little town of Louisburg, my eyes have been opened. Everything is so different, the grind, the people, the difficulty and most definitely the level of intensity.”



Photo courtesy Northwest

Missouri State

Northwest Missouri State freshman Sophie McMullen is excited for her first season of collegiate volleyball after helping Louisburg to a second place state finish.

McMullen will begin her Bearcat career as an outside hitter,

but is currently working behind a pair of upperclassmen at the same spot, so she realizes she will need to keep working hard to get to where she wants to be.

“I could not be more excited for this season to finally begin,” McMullen said. “I am very hard on myself because of the amount of experience I have had in this sport, therefore my expectations for myself are very high. I came here in the summer and really worked hard in the weight room. I hope to find more of myself this season and to really truly push myself to be that better person, not just as a player.

“I hope to work hard and grind through the struggles and to get on the court and make an impact and contribute all that I can. These girls are my new family and I am so blessed to be a part of this program.”

Throughout the season, McMullen will see some of her previous volleyball family along the way as well as the Bearcats will face off with Pittsburg State and Lindenwood, along with her former teammates Lauren Dunn and Bailey Dvorak.

“I could not be more excited to see my girls that I played with just 3-4 years ago,” McMullen said. “That is one of the main reasons that I picked Northwest so that I could see my girls on the other side of the net rather than on my side.

“I think that the Louisburg program speaks for itself, seeing the amount of girls and talent that leave that gym and go on to become collegiate athletes. For me to be a part of that program for 4 years was honestly just a blessing. I loved all my girls and teammates and I can't wait to go back home to see my little sister (Rinny McMullen) and the girls kill it on the court. It warms my heart knowing that is where I get to say I played and where I grew up.”