

Lady Cats fight way to state runner-up finish



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team are (front row, from left) Chase Kallevig, Riley Kallevig, Anna Dixon, Carson Buffington, managers Cameron Rogers and Bailey Kern; (back row) Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Erin Lemke, Sydni Keagle, Haley Cain, Alyse Moore, Carleigh Pritchard, Rinny McMullen, Davis Guetterman, assistant coach Mary Quinn, head coach Jessica Compliment and assistant coach Leanna Willer.

HUTCHINSON – The feeling was much of the same.

The pride of finishing as a state-runner up was a popular one among the members of the Louisburg volleyball team. At the same time, the frustration of taking second in state in back-to-back seasons was just as prevalent.

Louisburg wasn't quite sure what to feel following its 25-13 and 25-14 loss to Bishop Miege in the championship game of the Class 4A state tournament Saturday at Hutchinson Sports Arena.

In 2017, the Lady Cats fell to Rose Hill by two points in the championship match, and fast forward to the present, they were in the same spot – holding the state runner-up trophy. It was the 15th time in program history that Louisburg finished in the top four at state.

As disappointing as that was to some, the Lady Cats also

realize what it took to get to that final match.

“Losing in the championship match is a terrible feeling especially since we lost in the championship last year,” Louisburg senior Anna Dixon said. “We were all very upset, but we also had to remind ourselves that many girls or teams would have killed to even be able to compete in the state tournament.

“Miege just did not make mistakes and I think we were waiting for them to. They scrapped for every ball and had many offensive players that could put a ball down.”



Senior Anna Dixon slams down a kill during the Lady Cats' match Friday against Topeka Hayden

The Lady Cats faced off with Bishop Miege earlier in season, where they lost a 2-1 match to the Stags at the Ottawa Invitational. Louisburg had hoped to get a little revenge on

the biggest stage, but wasn't able to gain momentum in either set.

"I honestly think we let the name on their jersey get to us," senior Carson Buffington said. "We were fully capable of beating them, but again, we didn't come out and play the way we know we can. They got to us."

Before the championship, however, the Lady Cats were on the top of their game. In the state semifinals Saturday against Andale, they lost the first set 25-12, but came back to win the second 25-21 and then dominated the third set, 25-14.

"The comeback was great," Louisburg coach Jessica Compliment said. "I was so proud of how they adjusted in the second set and battled to win. Then they just came out roaring in the third. They had a goal and that was to make it to the state finals. They weren't going to let anyone stand in their way."



Louisburg's Carleigh Pritchard (right) blocks and Independence player at the net. Pritchard earned all-tournament team honors with Anna Dixon.

On Friday, Louisburg played some of its best volleyball of the season as it knocked off two defending state champions and the No. 1 seed in pool play to advance to the state semifinals.

The Lady Cats battled two-time defending state champion Rose Hill and got some revenge from last season as it downed the Rockets 25-10, 25-27 and 25-23. Louisburg then went on to beat No. 1 seed Independence 25-16 and 25-20.

In a match to determine seeding in the state semifinals, Louisburg squared off with defending state champion Topeka-Hayden in the final match of the day. The Lady Cats lost 20-25 in the first set, but rallied for a pair of 25-17 victories to finish pool play, 3-0.

"Their emotions were high against Rose Hill and Hayden," Compliment said. "To open pool play with Rose Hill given our history was exciting, and the team was hyped up to play them. We wanted revenge, and to see them come back in both matches is huge. We hadn't seen Hayden in a few years since the split of 4A, but the motivation to beat them still existed."



The Louisburg bench erupts after securing the win against Topeka-Hayden on Friday to finish pool play undefeated.

Dixon had several big performances in her final outing as a Lady Cat. The Louisburg outside hitter led the way with 64 kills in the five matches, including a 22-kill performance in the semifinals against Andale and also had 21 kills against Rose Hill.

She also finished with a team-high six blocks and was second on the team with 49 digs and five aces.

After the tournament was complete, the Kansas Volleyball Association released their all-state tournament teams. Dixon and sophomore Carleigh Pritchard earned tournament honors for their performance.

Pritchard was second on the team with 24 kills and also had five blocks. Also at the net, junior Haley Cain had a big tournament with 22 kills, a team-high six blocks and she also finished with three aces.

Buffington finished with 18 kills and three blocks in her final competition for Louisburg. Junior Riley Kallevig led Louisburg from behind the service line with seven aces and also had 10 kills, while junior Erin Lemke had 11 kills.



Freshman Rinny McMullen celebrates a point Friday during pool play.

Louisburg got a strong performance from its two freshmen setters. Rinny McMullen ran the offense well with 80 assists and also shined on defense with 34 digs. Guetterman had 56 assists in the five matches and had 22 digs.

Defensively, junior libero Reilly Ratliff-Becher was busy in the back row with a team-best 56 digs and Kallevig had 29 digs, which was fourth on the team.

"This team was just fun to coach and watch play volleyball," Compliment said. "At times, they were a bit frustrating. For instance...our serving. We just liked to keep the game going at times. But when it really came down to it, they made the plays

they needed to. We talked all season about starting and finishing strong. Throughout the season we had the tendency to come out slow. We did that a few times at state, but for the most part we played pretty well.

“We needed to peak at the right time and needed all of the pieces to fall in to place, and that happened at state. Each player on the team made some huge plays. Carleigh, Haley and Erin really made a difference at the net both defensively and offensively. Rinny had a great tournament. She and Davis did a good job running the offense throughout the entire tournament.”



Junior libero Reilly Ratliff-Becher gets ready to return a serve Friday.

As each Lady Cat player were given their state runner-up medal at the end of the tournament, the tears of ending their season

with a loss was impossible to hold back.

It was a special season that ended with a 36-9 record and second-place state finish. However, for some of the players, it was about more than wins and losses.

“This season was the best volleyball season I’ve ever been a part of,” Buffington said. “The chemistry we had with each other was amazing. We all love each other so much, and because of that, we meshed so well together. We are all crazy and weird and it added to the fun. I’ll miss my best friends so much and I can’t wait to see how far they go in the years to come.

“I’m so proud of our team and how much we cared for everything this season. I’ll miss the coaches and everything about LHS Volleyball. It hasn’t really sunk it too much yet, even though I’ll never play volleyball again. My high school career was such an amazing time and I’m so grateful with everything that has happened.”

Dixon’s Louisburg career also come to a close Saturday in Hutchinson. Although, she will still be wearing purple and white, the Louisburg senior will be suiting up for Kansas State next season to begin her college career.

As much excitement as that brings, the thought of not playing volleyball for Louisburg anymore still hasn’t quite sunk in.



Seniors Anna Dixon and Carson Buffington walk off the floor for the final time as Bishop Miege celebrates its state championship.

“It has not hit me yet that the season is over,” Dixon said. ‘It went by so fast and I had a lot of fun playing with some of my closest friends. I am going to miss them so much, but now I have to focus on the next level. I can’t wait to watch Louisburg succeed next year and go after the state title again.”

The Lady Cats have been one of the more dominant teams in Class 4A in the last decade as they have made the state tournament seven out of the last nine years and have finished as a state runner-up on three different occasions, along with several third and fourth place finishes.

It is that success that Compliment hopes will drive them team into next season.

“The loss was tough,” Compliment said. “To come so close to a state title two years in a row, only to come up short is tough. But with that being said, it is a huge accomplishment for this team to get back to the state championship and make it two years in a row. Finishing second is nothing to hang our heads on. Last year’s finish fueled the fire for the team this year, and I challenged the returning players to use this loss and feeling to fuel them for next year. The off-season starts today.”