

Lady Cats down Paola on emotional Senior Night



The Louisburg girls basketball team celebrates following its 54-48 victory over rival Paola on Friday in Louisburg. The Lady Cats are now 10-10 on the season.

The Louisburg girls basketball team squared off with Paola on Friday and the Lady Cats wanted to honor their two seniors – Carson Buffington and Kennia Hankinson – with a win in their final home game.

Louisburg didn't disappoint its two seniors as it ended the regular season with a 54-48 win over Paola and avenged a close loss from earlier in the season. It all culminated in what was a special night for everyone involved.

"It was the best feeling for me," Buffington said. "Paola has always been our rival, but to beat them for the final time that we will ever play them is just really special.

"It was really emotional out there. There was a lot going on, but we just had to remain level-headed and keep believing in ourselves. Even when Kennia and I both got into foul trouble,

we just had to keep moving forward.”

The Lady Cats (10-10) started and finished the game strong as they got out to a big lead, gave it up, but put together a good rally in the second half to get back in the game.

Louisburg jumped out to a 13-4 lead in the first quarter thanks to seven points from sophomore Madilyn Melton, but the Panthers responded to the run. Paola held Louisburg to just six points in the second quarter as the Lady Cats battled foul problems.



Senior Carson Buffington goes up for shot Friday against Paola.

Buffington had to sit for much of the second quarter with foul trouble, and during that time, Paola jumped out to a 23-19

halftime lead.

Foul problems got even worse in the third quarter when the team's leading scorers, Buffington and Melton, along with Hankinson, all picked up four fouls.

The Lady Cat bench responded and kept the game close as Brooklyn Diederich swished 3-pointer to give Louisburg a 31-30 lead, but Paola would take the lead back until the final seconds of the third.

Hankinson knocked down a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Lady Cats a 36-35 lead going into the fourth quarter and gave her team some much needed confidence.

"It was huge, but I thought our bench was really good all night and the energy they brought," Louisburg coach Shawn Lowry said. "Different girls were making plays and our bench was so excited and happy for their teammates that were on the floor and they were feeding off that. When Kennia hit that shot, it was a boost of adrenaline for everyone and it led into our fourth quarter."



Senior Kennia Hankinson drives to the basket Friday against Paola.

Paola either had the lead or the game was tied for half of the fourth quarter, but the Lady Cats went in front on a Buffington 3-pointer. Paola tied it again, but junior Haley Cain broke the game open with a 3-pointer with 3 minutes and 47 seconds left in the game to give Louisburg the lead back and it wouldn't relinquish it.

"It was a deep a three for sure," Lowry said of the shot. "It was just another kid stepping up when we needed it.

I was just so proud of their togetherness and how special that is.

"A lot of different girls had to step up. Whether it was Brooklyn working her tail off on defense, or Sydni (Keagle) coming off the bench and gave the minutes that she gave. They continue to battle and push. No matter what was happening, the girls refused to lose this

game on Senior Night for those two seniors. It was awesome to see and great to be a part of.”

Buffington was then able to ice the game at the free-throw line as she knocked down 3 of 4 attempts to help put the game away.

Buffington made a lasting memory for the Wildcat crowd as she led all scorers with 18 points to go along with eight rebounds and a team-high four steals.

“You talk about leadership and putting the team on her shoulders, Carson provided all of that for us,” Lowry said. “We needed the ball to be in her hands and she made some big free throws there down the stretch. That is what she is and what a great way for both seniors to finish out their career on their home floor. You can’t draw it up any better.”

Melton also scored in double figures for the Lady Cats as she finished with 14 points, while sophomore Alyse Moore had seven points and a team-high nine rebounds and four steals. Diederich also had a team-high six deflections and Cain led Louisburg with five assists.

“It felt pretty amazing, especially since everyone contributed to it and we all just came together and came out with a lot of energy and we were able to get the win,” Hankinson said.

Postseason play now begins for the

Lady Cats as they earned the No. 11 seed and will travel to No. 6 Parsons (14-6) for a 7 p.m. tipoff on Thursday. The winner of that game will face the winner between No. 3 Baldwin (17-1) and No. 14 Atchison (7-13) on Saturday for the sub-state championship.

"We are going to take a road trip down to Parsons and they have a really nice player and a really nice team," Lowry said. "It will be a challenge, but we just want a shot to get in the sub-state championship game and hopefully we can go down there and play well."

LOU	13	6	17	18 –
54				
PAO	8	15	12	13 –
48				

LOUISBURG (10-10): Carson Buffington 5-6 7-8 18; Madilyn Melton 5-14 4-9 14; Alyse Moore 1-6 5-9 7; Haley Cain 2-6 1-3 6; Kennia Hankinson 1-9 0-2 3; Brooklyn Diederich 1-5 0-0 3; Sydni Keagle 1-4 0-0 2; Erin Lemke 0-0 1-2 1. Totals: 16-51 18-33 54. 3-point field goals: 4, (Buffington, Hankinson, Cain, Diederich)