

UPSET SPECIAL: Lady Cats win regional title to advance to state



Members of the Louisburg softball team hold up the Class 4A regional championship trophy Tuesday in Ottawa following the Lady Cats' 6-5 win over Chanute in the regional title game.

OTTAWA – Madison Svoboda could feel her heart starting to come out of her chest.

Karson Griggs was a feeling a little nauseous.

Those are some of the same feelings that were flooding the Louisburg softball's team dugout during the final inning of the Class 4A regional championship game against Chanute on Tuesday in Ottawa.

Louisburg held a one run lead, but Chanute had the tying run on third, two outs, and a trip to the state tournament was on the line. On the mound was sophomore Brooklyn Diederich, and with two strikes, the Chanute batter fouled five straight pitches.

The tension was mounting.

Finally, on the 10th pitch of the at-bat, Diederich got what she was looking for – a swing and miss.

The strikeout sealed the Lady Cats' trip to state with a 6-5 victory over No. 7 seed Chanute and sent shockwaves throughout Class 4A softball.



Sophomore Brooklyn Diederich celebrates after she recorded a strike out to get the final out of the regional championship game against Chanute.

"I want to cry, but at the same time I am just really happy," Griggs said. "It is exciting because I never thought something like this could happen, especially this year. It feels really nice and now maybe people will actually start taking us seriously."

Not many gave people gave the Lady Cats a chance as they entered the Class 4A regional tournament

with just five wins and were forced to begin tournament action in the play-in game.

After a 17-2 win over Parsons last Monday in the play-in game, No. 15 Louisburg advanced to the regional semifinals and upset No. 2 seed Ottawa, 9-7, which helped set up the Lady Cats' first state tournament appearance since 2014.

"I think a lot of other teams underestimated us," Diederich said. "The fact that we came out and played our hardest ball showed what type of team we actually are. It is just crazy."

The Lady Cats (8-14) weren't without their obstacles in both games.

Louisburg needed seventh inning rallies in both games to get the victories. Against Ottawa, the Lady Cats trailed 7-4 going into their final at-bat and they answered that call with five runs in the seventh.

With the bases loaded, Diederich reached on an Ottawa error to score Griggs and then Kayla Willey worked a walk to force in another run. Junior Lauren Cutshaw delivered the biggest hit of the inning with a 2-run single that scored Paige Eccher and Diederich.

Svoboda added another insurance run as she singled home Willey and the Lady Cats took a 9-7 lead into the bottom of the seventh.



Paige Eccher slides safely into third against Chanute on Tuesday.

Diederich then worked around a two-out single from Ottawa and picked up her second win in as many games as she was also the winning pitcher against Parsons.

“We knew we could do it, but we just had to believe in ourselves,” Svoboda said. “Ottawa was a pretty high seed, but it also gives us an advantage because they were looking down at us and we had nothing to lose.”

As big as that rally was, it was the second time in the game where the Lady Cats had to stop Ottawa’s momentum.

The Cyclones scored three runs in the fourth inning to tie the game and

Louisburg didn’t waste any time to respond.

Griggs cranked a solo home run to

centerfield that hit the top of the fence and bounced over and gave the Lady Cats the lead right back.

Ottawa answered with two runs in the fifth and two more in the sixth to take the 3-run lead and set up the big seventh-inning rally from Louisburg.

“We just have guts,” senior Molly Rison said. “We showed a lot of resiliency in both games. When we were down in both games, I don’t think any of us ever thought the game was over. Even in the first game when we were down by three runs, it just shows that when we come together then we can get it done.”



Kayla Willey makes contact with a pitch against Ottawa to reach on a single.

Against Chanute, the Lady Cats got off to a good start again as they led 3-0 going into the

bottom of the fourth,
but the Comets took advantage of two Louisburg errors to score
two in the
bottom of the fourth and another in the fifth to tie the game.

Defense kept the game close for Louisburg as Svoboda caught a
line drive at second base that turned into a double play and
shortstop Alyse Moore had a couple leaping catches to halt a
Chanute rally.

The game remained tied going into the top of the seventh when
Svoboda opened the inning with a routine fly ball to center.
The Chanute center fielder slipped and fell while trying to
make the catch, allowing Svoboda to reach with a single.

That play opened the flood gates for the Lady Cats. Griggs
followed with a double that scored Svoboda and Eccher singled
home pinch-runner Jordan Mynsted to put Louisburg up two.
Diederich singled home Eccher with two outs to give the
Wildcats an insurance run that they ultimately needed.



Alyse Moore lets out a big scream as the rest of her Lady Cat

teammates come together to celebrate their regional championship.

Freshman Mia Wilson started the game for Louisburg and held the Comet bats in check as she gave up just one earned run through five innings. August Daniels came in for relief and went into the seventh inning and gave up just one run in her inning of work.

Diederich then entered the game with one on and no one out in the seventh to close out the game. She gave up a hit and a run in the inning of relief – but her biggest stat was her one strikeout to end the game. Diederich finished the regional tournaments with a pair of wins and a save.

“Our pitching staff did a fantastic job in both games,” Louisburg coach John Ozier said. “Coach (Megan) Balke has done a fantastic job with them all season. Brooklyn was really hitting her spots, and forcing Ottawa to hit a lot of ground balls to locations we were able to handle. My message to her is always think about the great defenders around her, and don’t feel like she has to strike anyone out.

“I can’t say enough about the job that Mia and August put forth in the second game. Both were chomping at the bit to get into game one, but the time had not yet arrived for them to contribute. Mia gave her team a strong performance before she gave way to August. When August entered the game, she really threw some quality pitches before she gave way to Brooklyn.”



Louisburg coach John Ozier talks with his team following the Lady Cats' win regional title win.

The end of the game dramatics was a special way for the Lady Cats to end their run as Diederich's final strikeout emptied the Louisburg dugout as the player ran to the middle of the diamond for their regional championship celebration.

"Honestly I was just in shock at that moment," Diederich said. "I was thinking to myself, 'Are we really state bound?' There were just so many thoughts going through my head – it is crazy."

Ozier loved the determination he saw from his team throughout the tournament and their ability to make big plays when they needed them most.

"The battle at the end of the game between Brooklyn and the Chanute hitter was epic," Ozier said. "It had everyone from both sides on the edge of their seats. When she finally won the battle, a flood of emotions hit our players and coaching staff hard. It was the ending that I was hoping for."

“The girls all deserved this moment. We have worked so hard over the past four years to give this program respect and credibility. I am so proud of each and every one of them.”



The Louisburg softball team poses with their regional championship trophy following their 6-5 win over Chanute. Members of the team (from row, from left) are: Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Brooklyn Diederich, Mia Wilson, Kayla Willey; (second row, from left) Paige Eccher, Lauren Cutshaw, Molly Rison, Karson Griggs, Madison Svoboda; (back row, from left) head coach John Ozier, assistant Megan Balke, Jordan Mynsted, Alyse Moore, Jada Frazier, August Daniels, Jenna Terry, Kat Coolidge and assistant coach Nick Chapman.

Louisburg will try and keep that momentum going Thursday when the Lady Cats begin play in the Class 4A Kansas State Softball Championships in Salina. Louisburg, the No. 8 seed, will open with No. 1 Andale/Garden Plain (21-1) at 5 p.m. at the Bill Burke Complex.

No matter what happens, the Lady Cat players are excited for their first state experience.

“I am super excited, but I am know that we are all going to have to put in a lot of work and show everyone what we are actually made of and it is going to be a lot of fun,” Diederich said.