

Players, coaches mourn loss of spring sports season



Louisburg softball, along with the rest of the Wildcat spring sports teams, saw their season come to a close with the spread of COVID-19.

It has been almost a week since Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly closed all schools for the rest of the 2019-20 school year due to the spread of COVID-19.

When most students hear school has been closed, especially in the winter, cheers erupt. In this case, however, the tone was much more somber – especially among the senior class.

Proms were canceled. Any plans they had for a graduation ceremony were put on hold, and for more than 30 seniors, their last opportunity at playing a sport at Louisburg High School was taken away.

In fact, close to 200 students were planning on participating in an activity in the spring, but with no school, the Kansas State High School Activities Association followed suit and canceled the spring season the day after Gov. Kelly's declaration.

Students, parents and coaches alike have had to come to grips that a season they had been looking forward to all year, was never going to happen. Tears flowed, walls were punched in frustration and some were left speechless.

There would be no game days, no Senior Nights and no postseason runs. Athletes had to figure out how to cope with this fact – and in many cases – are still trying to do so.

GIRLS SOCCER

Mackenzie Scholtz didn't spend as much of her Spring Break relaxing with family and friends as she wanted.

Instead,
she found herself focused on social media, constantly checking updates on what
was going to happen with the rest of her senior year. She was scared that her
final soccer season was going to be taken away from her.

Turns
out, those fears became a reality.

"When
I read it for the first time, I just couldn't believe it," Scholtz said. "I
immediately broke down in tears. I think I cried for about four hours non-stop
just thinking that I would never get to step on that field with my best friends
ever again. I had such high hopes for this season too and had been so excited
all year."

Before
this all came about, none of the 12 Louisburg seniors had any idea they had
already played their last match as a Wildcat.

The

senior class of Scholtz, Avery O'Meara, Erin Lemke, Lily McDaniel, Ashley

Moore, Trinity Moore, Skylar Bowman, Haley Cain, Hannah Straub, Olivia Chase,

Andie Masten and Morgan Messer provided Wildcat coach Kyle Conley with a lot of

good memories, which left the news even harder to stomach.

Louisburg

was looking for its fourth consecutive state final four appearance after

earning second place finishes the last two seasons.

"The decision absolutely broke my heart,"

Conley said. "I couldn't in a million years fathom something like this could

happen. I honestly felt the cancellation was harsh this early, but would have

rather like to have seen a postponement and then reevaluate at a later date.

This group of 12 seniors was going to be very special. If they would have

returned to the state final four this season, they would have been one of only

two 4A-1A teams to do this improbable feat. This group was 44-18-1 in their

three years. I would be willing to bet this is the most successful program over

those three years in regards to win percentage. Obviously, winning state

championships would trump that, but we were extremely successful."

The one thing that has helped players get

past this disappointment is that there are so many seniors to lean on and they

have done a lot of that this past week.

“The amount of support from this team has helped me so much,” Scholtz said. “As soon as we found out that we would no longer play, all of us seniors were sending nothing but love to one another as well as to the whole team. Individually, there were many messages sent showing how much we love each other and that this would get better. Coach Conley and the younger girls also shared a lot of great messages as well. Hearing positive words is really helping me get through this whole thing.”



The 2020 Louisburg High School girls soccer team

Many of the 12 seniors and their parents were a part of the group that helped raise money to start the Louisburg program nearly five years ago. They had always dreamed of winning a state title, but the wondering what could have happened is the worst part for a lot of them.

“This group had three goals: they wanted to win a league title, to win a regional championship and

finally win a state championship," Conley said. "This would have been our program's fifth year and everything was built for this season. I believed in this group and I felt we were going to compete for that league title and we were going to go back to the state final four. We wanted three banners: league title, regional championship, and a state championship. It's so sad that we will never get the opportunity to show the state what this team is capable of accomplishing."

BASEBALL

Kade Larson was all set to begin his first season as the head baseball coach at Louisburg High School.

Larson, who was hired late last spring, was looking forward to leading his alma mater and had high expectations for a group that was young, but returned experience from the year before.

Then came the news from KSHSAA to cancel spring activities, which left Larson, and the rest of the Wildcat program, speechless – including seniors Madden Rutherford, Andrew Krause and Kaden Oehlert.

"To say I am disappointed is an understatement," Larson said. "I was very excited for this upcoming year. Being my first year as head coach I was more than ready to get the season underway and see what kind of team we had. I thought we could do some great things this year with the group that we were working with. For

the short time
we were able to practice, they had a great chemistry and
worked super hard.

“I feel terrible for all the players having
to lose a season like this, especially the seniors. Madden
Rutherford and Andrew
Krause were showing great leadership skills and I hate that
they had their
final season taken away. They are unprecedented times that I
never thought
would happen.”

Rutherford, who is a two-time All-Frontier
League player himself, was ready to make one final run with
the Wildcats. Even
though he has signed to play baseball for Washington
University in St. Louis,
he regrets not being able to have one final run in high
school.

“Personally
I was just ready to just play ball again,” Rutherford said.
“My football season
ended with an injury, and two surgeries later I was just
starting to get back
into the swing of things. I was excited for the baseball team
this season; we
had a different looking coaching staff and a different
mentality which was
evident at practice. I’ll always be left wondering what could
have happened.”



Senior Madden Rutherford, along with fellow seniors Andrew Krause and Kaden Oehlert, all saw their high school careers come to a close with the spread of COVID-19.

As

difficult as it was for the seniors, the junior class will also have some

obstacles to overcome – especially for those who are wanting to play at the college level.

“To go with the seniors, this is also horrible for the juniors,” Larson said. “Junior year is a big recruiting time and a lot of these guys are missing that. So all around

this just is a bad time for an athlete, but I know they will work through it

and come back next year ready to go.”

Even
with all the hardships athletes are facing, including the loss
of a season,
several are trying to find the silver lining in it all.

“The
whole COVID-19 situation has made me appreciate what I have,”
Rutherford said. “It’s
hard to truly recognize how nice you have things until they’re
taken away. I
just hope and pray that things don’t escalate further.”

TRACK AND FIELD

Carlee
Gassman and Sydni Keagle were ready for the seasons of their
lives on the track
this season.

Gassman,
who is a returning a state medalist in the hurdles, was
considered one of the
best returning 300-meter hurdlers in Class 4A. As for Keagle,
she finished one
spot away from a state medal last year in the 100 hurdles.

Both
Louisburg seniors had high hopes, as did the rest of the Lady
Cat track team
that was ranked high in Class 4A in the preseason. That made
the news of
canceling spring sports all the more crushing.

“I honestly couldn’t believe it,” Keagle said. “At first I
was in shock and then I was just incredibly sad at this loss
of opportunity and
it’s taken a while to come to terms with the fact that I won’t
be able to
compete in my favorite sport one last time.”

Gassman felt much the same way as she earned three state medals as season ago. Along with sophomore Delaney Wright, who garnered four state medals, the two athletes figured to score a lot of points for the Lady Cats this season.

“When I heard the last quarter of my senior year was cancelled and knowing track would be over as well, I found myself crying about not having school,” Gassman said. “I never thought I’d find myself crying over school. I am just trying to keep my head high – there are better things to come.”

Girls coach John Reece said there were 34 out for track before the team departed for Spring Break, which was one of the bigger groups the Lady Cats have had in several years.



The Louisville 4×400 relay of (from left) Carlee Gassman, Rain

Pugh, Sydni Keagle and Delaney Wright were some of several returning Lady Cats trying for a big state performance.

"It is a huge bummer that everything got nixed," Reece said. "We had a chance to do some great things this track season on the girls side. We could have been a top three team at state with a handful of very talented girls. My heart goes out to the girls and the missed opportunity for them."

The same could be said for the boys as the Wildcats featured a big roster of 74 athletes and Louisburg would have been competitive in most events throughout the season.

"I am just extremely disappointed," boys coach Andy Wright said. "We had 74 boys out, which is the biggest number we have had in several years. We had multiple state qualifiers returning as well as some newcomers that could have helped contribute to a successful year."

One of those qualifiers was javelin thrower Michael Waldron. The Louisburg senior finished just a few feet away from earning a state medal a season ago, and now his attempt at getting there has been dashed.

"It's really hard to describe the disappointment I had when I heard that I wouldn't be able to throw javelin this year," Waldron said. "It was tough and very hard to wrap my mind around, it's tough

knowing that I had about a week of practice under my belt and a lot of preparation for the first meet of the year. Just finding out I wouldn't be competing at all was crushing."

The season was an important one, not only to Waldron, but to the rest of the track seniors as well. Anthony Davis (distance), Trent Martin (pole vault), Charlie Koontz (sprints, relays), Carter Anglin (discus), Garrett Harding (shot put) and Indy Strumillo (jumps) were all in their final year and were excited with what lied ahead. A few of them had already made plans to work out together over Spring Break to get some extra work in.

"I texted Carter Anglin and Garrett Harding about the fact that our season was over, since we all threw together," Waldron said. "It was tough for Carter because I knew he was thinking about a possible state appearance this year. For Garrett, it was his first year but he had some good success in the first few weeks with throwing shot put, so I know he was excited. It's just a bummer and we have texted each other, and comforted one another. We are just still in shock – it was like a slap in the face."

GOLF

Calvin Dillon has already had the best career in Louisburg High School golf history, and he accomplished that after his junior season.

Still, he wanted a lot more.

Dillon, who is a three-time state medalist, was looking for that elusive state championship this year and was considered one of the favorites going into the season. With the cancellation of spring sports it left Dillon, like many others, wondering 'What if?'

"It was definitely hard to hear that the regular season, as well as postseason were canceled," Dillon said. "It seemed like it happened all of a sudden. When you hear of professional and collegiate seasons being cancelled, you feel some remorse and disappointment for them, but when your own season gets cancelled, it becomes real."

The remorse for his own season wasn't what Dillon was feeling. It was the fact that he had hoped to lead a team – full of seniors – to its second consecutive state tournament appearance.

Seniors Drake Varns, Garrett Rolofson, Ryan Haight and Colin Cook all returned from that team, while other seniors like David Perentis, Deven Wieland and Luke Wickersham were also trying to vie for the final spots.



Five of the six golfers from Louisburg's state team returned in 2020 to try and make another trip to the state tournament. (From left) Colin Cook, Drake Varns, Calvin Dillon, Ryan Haight and Garrett Rolofson.

"We definitely had high expectations for this season," Dillon said. "With the heavy amount of seniors on the team, as well as our regional and state experience last year, we were really excited. I think the most disappointing thing for all of us is going to be the lack of closure. We were all looking forward to one last go-around, and to have our season disappear in a matter of days is devastating."

Like with every other conflict in life, the Wildcats are trying to make sense of it all and find a positive side to what has been a forgetful week.

“One positive that comes from this situation is the gratitude we will now have for our everyday lives,” Dillon said. “You never know when something catastrophic like this can happen, and we need to be thankful for the life we do have. Although this situation is disappointing for us, it was ultimately God’s plan. He is the one that is in control, and if we seek him in this time of discomfort, we will find the closure and satisfaction that we lost along with our senior season.”

GIRLS SWIMMING

It was an historic season before it even started as Louisburg would join the Osawatomie-Paola girls swim team for the first time this year.

Unfortunately, thanks to the pandemic spreading across the country, history will have to take a back seat for another year.

Head coach Maddie Carrigan was in her first year with the program after assisting with the boys team last winter, so finding out the news with everyone else was a little tough to take.

“It was really upset when I heard the news,” Carrigan said. “Obviously, I understand the reason for the cancellation of school and

sports season, so I completely back the decision. It was still a huge bummer for me because this was my first time having a high school head coaching role. It was a pretty big honor since I'm only 23 and I was super excited to try some fun new things I came up with for the girls. The first two weeks were already so much fun and the girls improved so much, so I can't imagine how great the whole season would have been."

Osawatomie-Paola-Louisburg had three seniors swimmers this season, including Shayla Aye from Louisburg and Brayden Hanf and Grace Shore from Paola.

In all, Louisburg had eight swimmers on the team including Aye, Claire Brown, Bailey Hallas, Sydney Keaton, Dana Mattison, Anna Morrison, Dagen Page and Reese Reitz.

"Everyone is really bummed, especially the seniors," Carrigan said. "We had a lot of first time swimmers, as well, so I hope this doesn't deter them from joining the team again next year."

SOFTBALL

Last year was a special season for the Louisburg softball team as the Lady Cats made a run to a regional championship and a state tournament appearance.

It was a great last part of the season for several of the Lady Cats.

Unfortunately, with the news of COVID-19, this year's version of Louisburg softball team will never get another chance at a magical season.

"When I found out my season was canceled, I was devastated," senior Reilly Ratliff-Becher said. "It would be the last time I ever played softball and it's just taken away from me."

The seven Lady Cat seniors were excited to begin this season, as was their coach, Nick Chapman. Chapman was in his first year as head coach with the program after spending last season at the junior varsity level.

After a couple weeks of practices, Chapman had barely gotten a chance to get to know his new team. Then he had to deliver the news that no one wanted to hear.

"This was not easy news to get," Chapman said. "It was even harder to have to tell the girls and even worse that I had to do it over the phone. It's still not real. Next week, we were going to get back to work and prepare for a special season. The girls had bought into what we were trying to accomplish. Just in two weeks, the culture was changing and girls were understanding what it meant to play team softball and do what is best for the team. The end of last week we had our first team bonding night.

The seniors set their team expectations and goals for the year. I listened to each of them say how excited they were for this specific year and to make one last run at it.

“I was crushed to have to tell them they weren’t going to get that chance. All seven of them helped mold this team into something special and set the tone for what Louisburg softball should be. I was excited for the product we were going to put on the field game one. I thought this year was going to be a season full of success.”

The seven seniors consisted of Ratliff-Becher, Allie Boles, Lauren Cutshaw, Kayla Willey, Kat Coolidge, Gabby Duggar and August Daniels. Some of those seniors were a big part of the Lady Cats’ state run a year ago, while others were looking to make an impact on the varsity level this year.

“I had very good expectations for this year,” Ratliff-Becher said. “As much as I feel bad for myself, teammates and my fellow seniors, I feel especially bad for Chapman. He worked so hard once he found out he got this job. I was so ready to learn and make him proud this season.

“I tell myself is that I have to think of other people in this situation. This could all be much worse. We are just containing this virus and protecting the

ones at the most risk, although it's going to be hard on everyone for a while."