

Lady Cats get a chance to play one final game



The Louisburg girls softball team played in the “One Last Game” event last week at Blue Valley Recreation in Overland Park. Members of the team are (front row, from left) Mia Wilson, Brooklyn Diederich, Jordan Mynsted, Maggie Ming, Jada Frazier, Jenna Terry; (back row) coach Nick Chapman, Allie Boles, Lauren Cutshaw, Kat Coolidge, Gabby Dugger, Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Kayla Willey, August Daniels and assistant coach Megan Balke.

The game in no way replaced what could have been for the 2020 season, but for the Louisburg softball team, last week’s contest was the next best thing.

The Lady Cats got to play together for the first – and last – time on June 24 when they took part in the “One Last Game” event at Blue Valley Recreation Sports Complex. The event was put on by Midwest Sports Productions (MSP) and gave 30 high schools and their seniors a chance to play for their school one final time.

Louisburg took on St. James Academy, and although it lost 13-3, the game itself meant so much more than the result. It gave a group of players a chance to play one game after their season was lost to COVID-19.

Add to that, seniors Lauren Cutshaw, Reilly Ratliff-Becher, Allie Boles, Kat Coolidge, Gabby Dugger, Kayla Willey and August Daniels were able to end their careers in a somewhat

proper way.

"Honestly, taking that field in general flooded my mind with memories of when I first started playing in middle school on the club team I was on with Allie, Lauren and Kayla," Ratliff-Becher said. "It made me realize why I fell in love with this game. It was bittersweet. I was so happy to play with my, what would have been, senior season team. We would have been a really solid group."

It also gave Nick Chapman an opportunity to lead his team for the first time, as this was his inaugural season as the Louisburg head coach.

"Honestly, I didn't think much of it," Chapman said. "Any day on the ball field is a great day to me. I was happy to be out there with the girls and seeing them play. I kind of took a step back and just let them enjoy playing together. The result wasn't ideal, but the girls played hard and I saw glimpses of the great team we could have been this year."

Louisburg put some of that talent on display early thanks to third baseman Allie Boles. With St. James threatening to score with runners on the corners and no outs, Boles caught a line drive near the third base bag, touched the base to catch the runner off third and then threw to first baseman Kat Coolidge to get the runner at first and turned the rare triple play.

Although Louisburg was able to get out of that jam, St. James scored five runs in the next two innings. The Lady Cats scored their first run in the fourth when Coolidge singled home Boles.

They added pair of runs in the fifth when Maggie Ming led off with a triple and scored on a Brooklyn Diederich single. Diederich later stole second and scored on an error.

August Daniels started the game for Louisburg, while Diederich and Mia Wilson both pitched as well against the Class 5A

school in St. James, who had played a game earlier that day.



Louisburg senior Gabby Dugger beats out a throw to reach on bunt single.

Despite the loss, it was a still a memorable moment for the entire Lady Cat squad.

"This definitely brought closure for our team and for some of the seniors, with it being our last time ever playing competitively with girls we grew up with," Ratliff-Becher said. "I'm glad I participated or I would have definitely regretted it."

The event was started when Piper High School senior Bella Gravatt reached out to MSP after her softball season was cancelled due to COVID, much like other high school softball players in the state of Kansas. The event was hosted to

provide seniors a chance to play with their teammates one last time and give them a ceremony to be recognized.

In what has been a difficult year for many high school seniors, the event helped ease the pain of a lost season.



Senior Allie Boles gets ready to make contact with a pitch last week during the Lady Cats' 'One Last Game'

"I think this was the best ending to a strange year," Chapman said. "I missed being around this group every day. Being at practice was always the best part of my day because we were playing the game that I love and they were just a fun, hard working group to be around. There was never a dull moment with them.

"I'm glad the seniors got this one last game as a Wildcat. They helped me set the tone at the beginning of the year of

what this program is going to be about. I hope when they come back to visit, they are proud of where we are as a program. I know they are all going to do big things in the future and they will be greatly missed.”

With the 2020 season in the rearview mirror, Chapman is already focusing on what they hope will be a 2021 season.

“If everything holds up, we will have our camp on July 10 and then scrimmage on the 15th to start working with our new team and developing our fundamental skills this summer,” he said.