

# OPINION: Despite all the wins, Compliment cared for her players more



*After 15 years, Louisburg head coach Jessica Compliment is stepping away from the program as she helped the Lady Cats to eight state tournament appearances.*

Jessica Compliment is not even 40 yet, but she has already put together a resume that is worthy to put her in the Louisburg High School Hall of Fame.

As a 24-year-old first time head coach, the school hired Compliment 15 years ago in hopes of restarting the prominence of Louisburg volleyball that began with former coach Larry Harding.

She did that and then some.

- Eight state tournament appearances
- Seven top four finishes at state
- Three state runner-up trophies
- Compiled a 391-226 record
- Louisburg was named as the KVA Program of the Year in 2013
- She had numerous all-league and all-state players
- 4-time MO-KAN Small Class Coach of the Year

These were just some of the accomplishments Compliment was able to rack up during her time with the program – one that

came to an end last month when she resigned as the team's head coach.

Compliment loves volleyball. She loves her players, but there was really one thing that could ever pull her away from those two things – family.

She is currently expecting her third child and Compliment wanted to focus more time with her children and her husband, Bret. She knew it was the right decision, but it didn't make it any less difficult – especially when it came to telling her team.

“It was tough to tell the players because saying it out loud and publicly, also meant that the end was here,” Compliment said. “You form connections with the players over the years and with their families. I've had some families with a player in the program for eight, 10, 12 years so saying 'goodbye' in that aspect is hard too. They were all excited when I first told them I was pregnant with baby number 3, but I don't think anyone was expecting the second announcement.”

Compliment had the opportunity to coach some of the best athletes to come through the school and they were able to accomplish big things together.



***The 2015 Louisburg volleyball team pose for a shot after winning the league tournament. Members of the team (front row, from left) are Megan Lemke, Makenzie Kallevig, Lauren Dunn; (back row) coach Jessica Compliment, Olivia Bradley, Anna Dixon, Madison Turner, Cate Stambaugh and Sophie McMullen.***

Possibly the school's most accomplished player, Missouri sophomore Anna Dixon, helped Louisburg to two state championship games under Compliment.

"Coach Compliment greatly cared about all of her players," Dixon said. "She was such a great outlet to have both on and off the court as a coach. I knew that if I ever needed help with anything, she would always be there. That is something every player wants.

"The success of the Louisburg volleyball program is extremely rare for a public school, especially a small town public school who is able to compete against some bigger schools. Being a part of that program that she sparked was something very memorable, that I will always be thankful to have experienced."

Even when her players left, Compliment would still be there to support them while they were in college – many times having her two younger kids in tow to travel and watch them play.

Sophie McMullen, who plays for Northwest Missouri State, and a member of the 2017 runner-up team, was thankful for everything her former coach did – and continues to do – for her.

“Compliment was like a second mother to me.” McMullen said. “I remember always going to her classroom whenever I could to talk about life, volleyball, or anything else possible. I am so beyond thankful that I was fortunate enough to have had her for four years. We still talk today and she still tries her very best (even with two kids and one on the way) to make it to my college games. I looked up to her and she was always there for me when I needed it the most.

“Senior year earning second place at state was one of the most heartbreaking times of my career, yet her putting the medal around my neck and hugging me for the last time, I knew that she was proud and it was a great run and nothing that happened that day was going to take away from the awesome four years that I had under her coaching. Our relationship was beyond a coach and athlete and I wouldn’t have had it any other way.”



***Sophie McMullen shares a hug with coach Jessica Compliment following the state championship loss in 2017.***

Louisburg volleyball has always been a family affair and Compliment has seen numerous siblings come through the program. Whether it was ones with the last name Dixon, Lemke, Kallevig, McMullen, Quinn or O'Brien – she appreciated everyone that played under her. She even had a couple of former players come back to help her coach.

“There have been a lot of great athletes and volleyball players to come through Louisburg High School and many have gone on to play at the collegiate level,” Compliment said. “It’s been fun to see them continue playing the sport that they love. Quite a few former players have also gone on to coach club, middle school, and high school volleyball. I’ve had the honor of having two former players as part of my coaching staff, Katie Dixon and Kallie O’Keefe. I enjoy

hearing their stories from time to time, and I'm glad to see that they are sharing their passion for the sport with the younger athletes."

Sydney Dixon, who was a an all-state player on the 2013 team that finished second at state and went on to play at Fort Hays, remembers her time with the program fondly. She watched as an older sister (Katie), younger sister (Anna) – and even her brother Dane (a manager) – go through the program and appreciates what Compliment has done for her entire family.

"Coach Compliment started coaching me from a pretty young age going to camps all the way through high school," Sydney said. "Not only was she supportive of me on the court and in our gym, but she would always make an effort to come watch club tournaments, graduation parties, go above and beyond with me in the class room, and so much more even into adulthood.

"It takes a special soul to not only coach my two sisters and I, but also having my brother be a manager. I know my parents are so thankful she handled that with such grace and patience."



**Louisburg head coach Jessica Compliment was named the GKCVC Kansas Small-Class Coach of the Year in 2019. Compliment coached the Kansas team with assistant Kallie O’Keefe (left) and Leanna Willer.**

Winning has always been important to Compliment – but never the most important. She wanted her players to succeed in life and that was always her goal.

With all the success the Lady Cats had the last 15 years, it didn’t come without some heartbreak along the way. They were never able to get the program’s first state title, even though they came really close on a couple occasions.

“I’ve learned that I can’t go back and change a decision that was made, nor can I control the uncontrollables,” Compliment said. “Sure, winning a state title would have been awesome, but I also can’t be disappointed with the outcomes over the years. I was reminded by my high school coach that many

coaches dream of earning the opportunity to coach at a state tournament at least once in their career but never reach that goal. I have been fortunate enough to coach at eight state tournaments and have been a part of teams that placed in the top four seven years.

“When I was first hired at 24 years of age and without any previous head coaching experience, I don’t think I could have imagined all of the amazing opportunities and events that coaching here at Louisburg would offer or the amazing people I would meet along the way. I’ve also been blessed with many, many athletes with a love for volleyball, and who were dedicated and committed to this program and to their teammates.”

For me personally, her teams were always a joy to cover. I was always excited for volleyball season because I knew every year had a chance to be special. Most schools would love to have just a fraction of what Compliment and her teams were able to accomplish.

For the last decade or so, Louisburg has been pretty spoiled when it has come to volleyball and there are times where I have taken it for granted. Even in those “down” years, Compliment always had her team playing hard and that is the mark of a good coach.

It wasn’t the way she wanted it all to end – with a loss to Bishop Miege in the sub-state semifinals. She had her team playing like one of the best in the state last October, only to have to face the eventual state champion in the first round of postseason play.





***Jessica Compliment waves to the crowd during her last state tournament appearance as the Lady Cat head coach.***

Still, even in a loss, she had never been more proud of the way her players took on the challenge that day and fought till the end.

There are too many good memories to focus on the negatives and Compliment will leave behind plenty of positives to reminisce about. She will also still be there to support her former players.

“Some of my absolute best memories from high school were from volleyball and the program we all created together,” Sydney said. “I’m so grateful to have been a part of something so special, and Coach Compliment made a big impact on all of us. She will be missed so much, but I know she will continue to be her supportive, outgoing, loving, and patient self with all of her players for years to come.”

Once a coach, always a coach.