

Louisburg boys volleyball ends regular season undefeated



Louisburg senior Wyatt Axmann sends a kill past a Lee's Summit West player during the Wildcats' home finale on May 5 at Louisburg High School.

Two years ago, Louisburg formed its first-ever boys volleyball team.

Boys volleyball, which is not a sanctioned sport by the Kansas State High School Activities Association, saw its rise in popularity in the Kansas City area. Schools began forming teams that played in their own league.

In fact, almost 60 schools formed teams back in 2019 and Louisburg had a successful season of its own.

Fast forward two years later, Louisburg continued its success as it finished undefeated in league play and were one of the best teams in the area despite missing last season due to COVID-19.

"The boys played great this year," Louisburg coach Geoff Branine said. "The second triangular we hosted, we had two of the top team's in the league and won both. We had our issues to work through, but the boys found a way to win.

"It was good to get back on the court. Covid has been tough on

all of us. It was great to have access to the high school this year. The larger facility allowed us to have more fans in the stands. We had great support from our community.”



Ben Rangel goes up for a kill during a home match earlier this season.

The highlight from the Louisburg season came on April 21 when the Wildcats hosted St. James Academy and Shawnee Mission, which was comprised of players from the entire district.

Louisburg held its own as the Wildcats defeated both teams and eventually led them to an undefeated regular season.

The Wildcat also had home wins over Rockhurst and De Soto/Mill Valley on April 7 and ended its home schedule with victories over Heritage Christian and Lee's Summit West.

That eventually led them to the end of the season tournament. Louisburg opened pool play with victories over St. Thomas Aquinas and Heritage Christian and moved on to the gold bracket.



Louisburg setter Matthew Sword rises up for a pass during a home match earlier this season.

Louisburg eventually lost in the first round to Karasuno and finished in fifth overall.

“We had a big comeback in the third period, but didn’t finish, and that put us fifth in the tournament,” Branine said. “Competition was better this year than in the past. Boys volleyball is growing, so more boys are playing. We finished second to St. James. We actually beat St. James this year. They ended up winning the big tournament and that put them into first.”

A big reason for the Wildcats’ success was their continuity as they had several varsity players return from their team in 2019.

Ben Rangel, Wyatt Axmann, Braden Branine, Ben Ratliff-Becher, Jacob Sanders, Matthew Sword, Dawson Barnes, Jesse Murphy, Brett Rangel and Isaiah Leonard all saw varsity time at one point in the season.



Members of the Louisburg High School varsity boys volleyball team are (from left) Braden Branine, Ben Rangel, Jacob

Sanders, Wyatt Axmann, Dawson Barnes, Matthew Sword and Ben Ratliff-Becher.

It was a special group of boys according to coach Branine and they are helping grow a sport – that one day – can become a sanctioned high school activity.

“Boys volleyball has grown a lot in the last few years,” he said. “Unfortunately covid has hurt the growth of high school volleyball. Prior to the season being cancelled last year, we had almost 60 teams. This year we had 30. Some of that is simply because some of the teams couldn’t find a facility.

“Boys club is getting bigger and bigger so the level of high school volleyball gets better and better. We are still probably not getting KSHSAA going in next couple of years. MSHSAA (Missouri) will probably have boys volleyball in Kansas City area first.”