McMullen transfers to national runner-up Washburn

Sophie McMullen, who is a 2018 Louisburg High School grad, transferred to Washburn from Northwest Missouri State after four years with the Bearcat program. (Photo courtesy of Northwest Missouri State)

Sophie McMullen thought she had played her final match last fall as she helped the Northwest Missouri State volleyball team to just its second NCAA tournament appearance.

After falling to Nebraska-Kearney in the first round, McMullen was all set to put the sport she loves, behind her.

The Louisburg High grad sat out the 2018 season with a medical redshirt and was also granted another year of eligibility due to COVID-19. Still, with two years remaining, McMullen was ready to move on.

“Volleyball is something that once you’re in it, it’s hard to say goodbye to,” McMullen said. “I was ready to say goodbye until this great opportunity fell into my lap and it was a no brainer from then on.”

That opportunity came unexpectedly from an MIAA conference rival.

McMullen transferred to Washburn University after earning a degree in elementary and special education from Northwest Missouri State.

She joins a national power in Washburn that finished as the national runner-up in the Division II Tournament and McMullen is familiar with the program.

“Washburn has always been a great program when I played against them at Northwest,” McMullen said. “They are a highly respected program and just made a great run at the National Championship tournament. My hope is that I am able to bring my passing, leadership, and experience to the program in a positive way since they just graduated 10 great athletes.”

The Ichabods will feature several new faces in their program including a pair of McMullen’s. Sophie’s younger sister, Corinna, who graduated from Louisburg High last spring, is one of the team’s setters.

Sophie McMulen finished second on the Northwest Missouri team in digs and fourth in aces last season.

Sharing the court with her sister is something Sophie has always wanted to do.

“Getting the opportunity to play with Corinna is unbelievable,” Sophie said. “It has been something that we have always dreamt about and we would always talk and go on and on about how much we wish we could have played together

just once, and here we are, finally getting that opportunity.

“We have supported each other through thick and thin and seeing her in the crowd at my games always brought a smile to my face, but now that we will be on the court together, the feeling is going to be so surreal. It’s hard to even put it into words.”

Washburn was very familiar with Sophie as she put together some of her best performances against the Ichabods while at Northwest.

In fact, Northwest defeated Washburn on three different occasions last season, including one where Sophie recorded a career-high 22 digs from her defensive specialist position when Washburn was ranked No. 1 in the country.

She finished her season second on the team with 297 digs and was fourth with 31 aces. Sophie also had 14 double-figure dig performances.

Changing to a back row player from an outside hitter while Louisburg was a change for her, but one she has grown into.

“Defense is something that I have always loved because it’s so fun,” Sophie said. “Digging an absolute rocket that nobody expects you to get close too is one of my favorite feelings in the world. Defense wins games and I believed that once I was able to get into the role and learn to really love it.

“On the other side of being a DS, passing is my true love. I feel so comfortable in my abilities to pass and I truly enjoy passing so I felt really comfortable where I was at for my position. It takes awhile to get comfortable with getting balls smacked at you continuously but in the end it’s pretty fun when you see yourself start to grow and have the ability to really start touching a lot of untouchable hits.”

Sophie has also thrived in the classroom as she is a four-time

member of the MIAA Academic Honor Roll. She is also pursuing her master’s degree in high incidence special education.

Now she is focusing on her time at Washburn as she tries to help the Ichabods get back into the national tournament and have a shot at a championship.

“My goals at Washburn are to make a positive impact and make memories with a new set of girls,” she said. “I am beyond excited for this opportunity and with two years left I can’t wait to see what the future has in store for me and my sister.

“My last season with Northwest was amazing. We made history and I wouldn’t have wanted to do it with any other group of girls. Seeing the Northwest program grow from my freshman year to my senior was amazing and I happy that I was able to have that experience.”