STATE BOUND: Louisburg upsets No. 1 seed Baldwin for sub-state title



Louisburg senior Adyson Ross hoists the sub-state championship trophy Saturday while teammates (from left) Allie Kennedy, Bronwynn Williams and Emma Prettyman were all smiles following the Wildcats' upset of No. 1 seed Baldwin.

BALDWIN CITY – Hailey Sword passed it. Megan Quinn set it. Allie Kennedy put it away.

Louisburg won its biggest match point in almost four years and earned the title of Cinderella as the Wildcats pulled out maybe the most shocking upset in the state last Saturday.

The Wildcats, the No. 9 seed, knocked off No. 1 seed Baldwin, 25-18 and 25-19, at Baldwin High School in the finals of the Class 4A sub-state tournament. That win puts Louisburg in the state tournament for the first time since 2019.

Cheers erupted, the bench emptied and tears started to flow. The Wildcats accomplished something many people didn't think was possible – except for themselves.

"It is just so unreal," senior Adyson Ross said. "There are no words. We all went into the game knowing that we could pull this off. We were all confident in each other and that was an unbelievable feeling to have. Then after it was all over – it is just unreal. It is the best feeling."

That feeling was one of happiness and a little bit of shock in what was surreal moment for everyone on the floor. The Wildcats had finally put together that complete game and did it at the exact right time.

“To say that I am proud would just be an understatement,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “My heart was so completely full for these girls – I’ve never experienced anything like it. Watching them tackle each other to the ground with overwhelming excitement and love for their teammates gave me so much joy. They played with incredible grit, determination, and heart to earn that trophy. It was a pretty surreal moment, and I am just thankful to be along for the ride.”



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team pile on each other at center court following their sub-state championship win over Baldwin.

The Wildcats, who came into the tournament with a record that was just above the .500 mark, faced off with the No. 2 ranked team in the state in Baldwin. The Bulldogs had just four losses on the season and had beaten Louisburg, 3-1, earlier in the year.

Louisburg put together a completely different performance as the Wildcats made very few errors and made a statement early by winning the first set and putting all the pressure on the Bulldogs.

“It did a lot for our confidence,” senior Claire Brown said. “We wanted to come out firing and we did. It paid off in our favor and we put so much heart into every single ball. Everyone was playing for each other.”

That selflessness all over the floor made the Wildcats a dangerous team on Saturday as each player made an impact. Not only against Baldwin – but also in their 25-18, 17-25 and 25-15 victory over the Fort Scott in the semifinals when their backs were against the wall.

“It is tradition that we all talk before the game,” Kennedy said. “We all talked about how we were the underdogs and that we can really take it. I truly believe that everyone thought that we could do it and we just put it all out there because there was nothing to lose.”



Louisburg senior Claire Brown puts away a kill Saturday against Baldwin.

There was a little doubt about how the Wildcats would take the floor Saturday. Senior middle blocker Emma Prettyman twisted her ankle earlier in the week in practice and the team wasn't sure if she was going to play.

Prettyman came up big for her teammates against Baldwin with five kills and two blocks on a bad ankle.

"We did our best to give her as much time to rest as possible, but I am so glad that she toughed it out and was able to play in Saturday's matches," Willer said. "Again, she wasn't going to let her senior season end from the bench, or at all. She wasn't at her strongest, but she made her presence known with a couple of huge blocks and key kills throughout the game."



Louisburg junior Hailey Sword goes up for a kill in the sub-state semifinals against Fort Scott.

Kennedy knows all about having her season end with an injury. She saw her season come to a close in the middle of last year with a leg injury and also missed time her sophomore season.

The Louisburg senior made the most of her sub-state appearance. Kennedy led the Wildcats with 16 kills to go along with three blocks and three aces in the two sub-state matches.

“It is just crazy,” Kennedy said. “All my years of high school we have had these amazing teams but we have never gotten this far. So to do this with all my best friends, and it being my senior year, it is just amazing. I am so proud of everyone.

“Sub-state is a big deal for me, especially with this being my senior year, because I knew it could be my last game. I just worked as hard as I could and made sure no ball hit the floor on defense.”



Louisburg senior Allie Kennedy records the final kill on match point against Baldwin.

However, that last kill was the one that was that Kennedy and the rest of the Wildcats will remember for awhile.

“Allie had a fantastic game, and she’s been playing really well here at the end of the season,” Willer said. “Her voice and leadership on this team have played a huge role, and her

game play has stepped up to match it. I don’t think Megan would have set any other player on game point, and that says a lot about what she means to our team.”

Quinn ran the offense well for Louisburg as she finished 51 assists and handed them out to several different hitters throughout the day.

Junior Madelyn Williams was second on the team with 14 kills to go along with a team-high four aces. Brown finished with 10 kills on the day and had three aces.



Louisburg’s (left) Madelyn Williams, Delaney Nelson and Claire Brown celebrate a big kill Saturday against Fort Scott.

Junior Hailey Sword had six kills but also led the Wildcats with four blocks. Ross, the team’s libero, had 12 digs and two aces.

Brown led the Wildcat defense with 19 digs in the two matches, while Williams finished with 17 and Sword added 12.

Along with the state berth, the Wildcats also exacted some revenge as Louisburg and Baldwin squared off last season in

the sub-state championship in Baldwin. The Bulldogs ended the Wildcats' season that time, but Louisburg was able to turn the tables in 2022.



Senior libero Adyson Ross returns a serve Saturday against Baldwin.

"Our girls played so well against Baldwin – the best they have played all season," Willer said. "We have talked about how the entire season leads up to this moment and it's just about showing everyone what we're made of. Previous record doesn't really matter when you come to play like that. Heading into the Baldwin match, our girls were amped to say the least. They were focused on getting revenge for last year's team and doing whatever it takes to continue their season.

"We have grown so much as a team all year long, and they decided to go out there and give it their all for the girls standing beside them along the way. Our theme of 'We Over Me' really clicked with this team as we prepared for our postseason run."

After winning the first set in convincing fashion, the

Bulldogs battled back in the second. Baldwin took an 11-8 lead, but a pair of Kennedy kills helped tie the match.

Tied at 14-all, Louisburg went on a 5-0 run to take a 19-14 advantage. Baldwin didn't go away as it rattled off four straight points to cut the Louisburg lead to one and Willer called a timeout.

Baldwin eventually tied the match at 19-all.

"I had everybody take a deep breath," Willer said. "We were getting frazzled, and needed to slow the game down in our minds. We talked about keeping our passes off the net to give Megan room to work, and for everyone to be available as a hitter to take pressure off of our only two front row hitters, Claire and Emma.

"Everyone on the bench at the time was positive and encouraging, and we knew we just needed to take back control and force Baldwin to play our game, versus the other way around. We told them to stay confident and trust themselves."



Louisburg junior Megan Quinn sets at the net Saturday in

Baldwin.

The Wildcats found that confidence again as Sword had two big digs in the back row to force a Baldwin side out and regained the lead at 20-19.

Ross went on to serve the next five points, including an ace. Brown added a kill and Kennedy came through with two kills, including the final one on match point.

“I think honestly, all of us knew that we could win this match,” Ross said. “Just coming together as a team, and having that belief in each other, knowing the your teammate is going to put that ball away and do their job – it is more powerful than anything else.”



The Louisburg volleyball team celebrates match point in the sub-state championship against Baldwin.

Louisburg will now take that team-first attitude into the Class 4A state tournament Friday in Hutchinson. The Wildcats are the No. 7 seed (20-17) will begin pool play against No. 2 Towanda-Circle (34-4) at 9:30 a.m. at Hutchinson Sports Arena.

The Wildcats will also have pool play matches against No. 3 Clay Center (27-10) at 10:30 a.m. and No. 6 Tonganoxie (24-14)

at 12:30 p.m. The top two teams in each pool will advance to the state semifinals Saturday.

Still as much as they are looking forward to state, the Wildcats are also relishing this moment, including Willer who won her first sub-state title as a head coach. Last Saturday, also happened to be her birthday and her team couldn't have given her a better present.



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team are (front row, from left) Emma Prettyman, Adyson Ross, Claire Brown, Allie Kennedy; (back row) assistant coach Kallie O'Keefe, assistant coach Rich Brown, Ashlyn Berck, Delaney Nelson, Izzy Moreland, Bronwynn Williams, Caileigh Kilgore, Megan Quinn, Hailey Sword, Madelyn Williams and head coach Leanna Willer.

"It means the world to me because I know exactly how much time, effort, and energy that these girls have devoted to our team to get to this point," Willer said. "There were very few people who even considered state a possibility for this team. I heard it referenced as a 'rebuilding year' countless times and we were definitely the underdog heading into Saturday's matches. This team came in with something to prove and I am so proud of each and every one of them."