

Wildcats ready for familiar foes as they try for first state title



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team mob each other after winning the sub-state title last Saturday at Baldwin.

It has been a revenge tour of sorts for the Louisburg volleyball team and it all started Saturday against Baldwin.

The Wildcat upset the No. 1-seeded Bulldogs to advance to their first state tournament since 2019. It was also payback from a loss in the sub-state championship game a year ago, and again earlier during the season.

“It has been super exciting,” senior Emma Prettyman said. “I know we were technically the underdogs going in, but we really stepped it up and to beat Baldwin was just really exciting. I can’t wait to see what state brings.”

What the state tournament has given the Wildcats so far is an opportunity to right some wrongs that happened during the season.

Four teams – Tonganoxie (twice), Bishop Miege, Paola and Towanda-Circle – handed Louisburg a loss and are all in the state tournament. Two of them – Tonganoxie and Circle – are in the same pool as the Wildcats.

The Wildcats will get their first shot at revenge at 9:30 a.m.

Friday when they open pool play against Circle and then will meet Tonganoxie at 12:30 p.m. Louisburg also has a match with Clay Center sandwiched in between. The top two teams in each pool advance to the semifinals

“I am excited about the rematch and glad this isn’t the first time we are seeing them (Circle),” Willer said. “Even though we lost, we have gotten better since then and the girls see it as an opportunity to show them how much we have grown. We have seen Paola, Tonganoxie and Miego too, and while those didn’t end in our favor the first time around, neither did Baldwin and look what we did.”



Louisburg senior Emma Prettyman goes up for a kill during last weekend’s sub-state tournament in Baldwin.

Louisburg lost to Circle in three sets in the championship game of the Circle tournament earlier this month. Circle is considered a top-3 team in the state and gives the Wildcats a tough opening match.

Still, the Wildcats aren’t deterred by what happened earlier in the year – they are using it as motivation.

"They were the last game of the tournament and everyone was pretty tired by that point," senior Claire Brown said. "I don't think we played them as well as we could have. I think our showing will be a lot different than last time we played them. They are a very good team, but we have a good shot at winning down there.

"We all have high expectations for ourselves. I think everyone is going to bring the best version of themselves for each game."

It has been an up and down season for Louisburg that ended with an 18-17 record going into sub-state action. It is one that featured different lineups and Willer was doing what she could to get the pieces to fit.

Then she decided to have a chat with Adyson Ross. The Louisburg senior had mainly been known as a hitter, but Willer wanted to try her out at the libero spot.

It was a change that took some getting used to.

"Adyson is the type of kid who will do whatever you ask of her," Willer said. "She knows the only reason we are asking is because it is what is best for the team. She tried it out a little bit over the summer, but she loves to hit. She is always asking in practice if she can hit and she just loves it. She loves blocking, but she also gets a lot of satisfaction being back there and getting a lot of digs.

"She's become the voice behind the hitters and she has taken ownership in that. She realizes that the move made our defense so much better and she is just consistent back there. While she can hit and block, we needed her more in that position."



Louisburg head coach Leanna Willer and Adyson Ross share some tears following the sub-state championship.

Ross has done it all for the Wildcats. As sophomore, she was an outside hitter, and as a junior, started on the outside and then moved to a defensive specialist spot, before having to play as a middle blocker due to injury.

Then after starting this season in the front row, made the move to the libero position, and the team started to head in the right direction. It began at the end of September at the Louisburg Invitational, when the Wildcats rattled off five wins in a row and took second.

There have been ups and down since then, but it has been a change for the better.

"Whatever the team needed I was okay with doing," Ross said. "If the team needed a libero, I was ready to play that position. It is definitely different than swinging, by a lot. You don't see many 5-9 girls in high school playing libero, but I just want to do whatever I can for the team. It doesn't matter where I am out on the court, I just want to help out."

Although the lineup was working better, Willer still noticed a lack of closeness between her team and focused on improving that as sub-state got closer.

Whatever they did, seemed to work as they came out as a team on a mission last Saturday.



Louisburg senior Allie Kennedy shares a hug with senior teammate Claire Brown following the team's sub-state win.

"You never realize that it is coming to an end until it gets close, then all of sudden you realize you are never going to get to do this again," senior Allie Kennedy said. "I am not going to play in college, so I wasn't ready for this to an end, and neither were the other girls. It made everyone step up and that it is a team thing.

"We figured that out and we did a lot of team bonding before sub-state. I think we are just all a lot closer now and that helps with trust and playing for each other."

Willer knew before the season even started that it was going to take some time for this group to jell together.

"The thing I am most proud of them for is how much they have

grown over the season,” Willer said. “Even after taking them to camp over the summer and in summer league, you could tell it was a group that wasn’t really comfortable with one another. They weren’t already friends, which was really the case with the group the last couple of years, so they have put significant time and energy into working together and becoming a team. They have grown to love each other, and you can see that now, but from where we started to where we are now – they are completely a different team.”



Louisburg junior Madelyn Williams wins a ball at the net last Saturday. Williams plays all six rotations for the Wildcats.

A lot players contribute for the Wildcats and it starts up front as Kennedy leads the team with 270 kills on the season and Brown is right behind her with 259. Prettyman and junior Hailey Sword each have 157, while junior Madelyn Williams has 141 kills from her all-around spot.

Louisburg junior Megan Quinn has had a good year as the team’s setter with 885 assists and is second on the team with 41 aces. Sword leads the way in that department with 46.

Brown, who also plays all six rotations, leads the team with 321 digs and Ross is right behind her with 319.

The Wildcats hope they can continue their good play from last weekend as they try for the program's first state championship.

"I am so ready for this," Ross said. "This is the kind of thing that every athlete dreams about at the start of the season. We are completely focused and we know that we are just not fighting to stay alive for another week – we want our name up on the wall. We want a state championship. That is exciting, but we are trying to stay as focused as possible."