

Wildcats rally together to finish fourth at state tournament



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team celebrate a big point Friday during pool play of the Class 4A state tournament in Hutchinson.

HUTCHINSON – The state tournament ended the way it started for the Louisburg volleyball team – with a loss to Towanda-Circle.

Still, it was everything that happened in between that made for a lot of lasting memories for the Wildcat players.

Louisburg went 2-1 in pool play Friday at the Hutchinson Sports Arena, which included a revenge win over Tonganoxie in the final match of the day. That gave the Lady Cats a spot in the state semifinals Saturday, where they finished fourth in Class 4A.

The Wildcats suffered a 2-0 loss to both Bishop Miege and Circle, but they still ended their season as one of the state's top teams.

"I am extremely proud of this team," Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. "Looking at how we started this season, and our ups and downs along the way, it is a huge accomplishment for them to have come together as a team at the end of the season and play our best volleyball yet. It was apparent in the last couple of weeks that they really started playing for each

other and capitalizing on the strong team bonds they built throughout the year.”



Louisburg senior Allie Kennedy goes up for a kill against Circle on Saturday in the third place match.

It was the 19th state appearance for the Wildcat program and the 15th time Louisburg has reached the final four. Louisburg's last state appearance was in 2019, when the Wildcats also finished fourth.

Circle was the Wildcats' first opponent in pool play Friday, and while they put up a fight, came up short in a 25-17 and 25-18 setback to the team that was ranked No. 3 in the state coming into the tournament.

The loss meant the Wildcats, more than likely, needed to win the final two matches to have a chance at the state semifinals. The team rallied in its next match as it defeated Clay Center, 25-17 and 25-18.

That win set up a showdown with Tonganoxie, a team that Louisburg had lost to twice already this season. It was a win

or go home scenario for both teams and the match – especially the first set – played out that way.

Louisburg outlasted Tonganoxie for a 32-30 win in the first set, and then used that momentum to take the match with a 25-18 victory in the second.



Louisburg's Madelyn Williams celebrates a point Saturday during the state semifinals.

"That first set was definitely a marathon, and it felt amazing to come out on top," Willer said. "I think whoever was going to win that set would have the momentum for the rest of the match, so I'm very glad we were able to finish it at 32. We went through six rotations of set points and defended theirs, but it was amazing to get that first set win.

"Our message to the team in between sets however was that that was only the first one. We have to go get another one right now and keep our momentum going. We didn't want that epic fight to be for nothing in the next set, so we were focused on starting off strong in set two."

Louisburg trailed 21-19 in the first set, but rallied to tie it on a kill and block from junior Madelyn Williams. The Wildcats then took a 23-21 lead on back-to-back kills from junior Hailey Sword.

Tonganoxie rallied to tie it, but the Wildcats played strong defense to take a 24-23 advantage thanks to a diving save from senior Adyson Ross off a Tonganoxie block, that in turn allowed junior Megan Quinn to get it out of the net and senior Claire Brown to knock it over. The Chieftains then sent the ball out of bounds to give Louisburg the point.

The Chieftains had set point on four different occasions, but the Wildcat defense was strong and kept the match alive. With the match tied at 30-all, senior Allie Kennedy tipped the ball over the net to give Louisburg the lead, and then Tonganoxie hit the ball out of bounds to give Louisburg the win.



Louisburg junior Hailey Sword goes up for a kill Friday during pool play.

“The Tonganoxie match really displayed how far this team has come in terms of chemistry and teamwork,” Willer said. “I love

how hard the girls fought for each other and how every single person, on the bench or on the court, was invested in the success of the team every step of the way.”

On Saturday, the Wildcats squared off with Bishop Miego – the eventual state champion. Louisburg lost 25-14 and 25-21 to the Stags, which set up a rematch with Circle for third place.

After dropping the first set 25-12, Louisburg had a three point lead late in the match, but eventually fell 26-24 to finish fourth.

“I thought we came out nervous, evident by the first set score,” Willer said. “That being said, I think we fought back well and played tough against a really good Miego team. I think it was harder for us to bounce back from the Miego loss than we anticipated, but we played better in the second set against Circle as well. Unfortunately, we just weren’t able to close out the second set and push it to three.”



Louisburg senior Adyson Ross dives to the floor for a dig Friday in Hutchinson.

Louisburg got production from all over the court throughout the tournament.

Kennedy led Louisburg at the net with a team-high 34 kills to go along with six blocks. Williams also had a big tournament with 29 kills and five blocks.

Brown had 24 kills from outside spot, while Sword finished with 18. Sword also had a team-high six aces in the five matches.

Senior Emma Prettyman had a team-high nine blocks to go along with 10 kills.

Junior setter Megan Quinn finished with 95 assists and celebrated a milestone of her own. Quinn eclipsed the 1,000 assist mark in the Lady Cats' win over Tonganoxie.



Louisburg junior setter Megan Quinn eclipsed the 1,000 assist mark

Ross led the Louisburg back row with 42 digs, while Brown finished with 38 and Quinn tallied 26. Williams was also big in the back with 34 digs.

As tough as the loss was, four Lady Cat seniors – Kennedy, Ross, Brown and Prettyman also played their final match for

the program. Still, it was a good way to end it as Louisburg will try to build on this moving forward.



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

"Our seniors finished their careers on an absolute high note, and next year's returners were able to gain valuable experience of postseason play," Willer said. "We have young girls who were able to get a taste of that feeling and we will be coming back hungry next season."