

Louisburg volleyball hoping for another state run in 2023



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword is one of three returning starters off of last season's state tournament team that finished fourth overall.

Last year, the Louisburg volleyball team was one of the few teams left standing when the season came to a close.

After the Wildcats upset No. 1 seed Baldwin for a sub-state title, Louisburg made a nice run through the state tournament and eventually ended with a fourth-place finish.

However, the Wildcats had to say goodbye to four senior starters off that team and head coach Leanna Willer has had to do a little bit of reshuffling – like many coaches do from year to year.

As tough as some have it, the Wildcats still return three starters from a year ago and have a seven-member senior class in hopes of reaching the state tournament, yet again.

“We did lose four amazing seniors, but we also have a lot of experience coming back,” Willer said. “This team will be a good mix of ‘old’ and young as we will have all four classes represented in our starting rotation. It’s great to have strong senior leaders as well as talented underclassmen come together as one unit.

“We are really working on that team chemistry right now to

solidify our group. We do have three senior returners maintaining a similar role that they had last year, but the other four are stepping up into bigger roles to fill some of the holes left by last year's graduating class."

Louisburg has a good foundation to build from with those three returning starters. Seniors Madie Williams and Hailey Sword will return as starting outside hitters and will play all six rotations after playing similar roles last season.

Senior setter Megan Quinn returns to lead the Wildcat offense after eclipsing 1,000 assists a year ago.



Senior Madie Williams returns as an outside hitter for the Wildcats and will play all six rotations.

“Having Megan, Hailey, and Madie return is huge for us as they gained tons of experience at a high level, especially toward the end of the season,” Willer said. “They have stepped up as our go to players all summer long as leaders on the court and

the ones we look to to 'get the job done' in tough situations.

"Hailey and Madie will hold down the fort for us on the outside, playing all the way around, so their defense and serve receive is just as important as their work at the net. Megan has done a great job thus far of running our offense and she will continue to have a big role as our setter and as a defender."

One difference this year is the Wildcats will be running a two-setter offense and Quinn will be joined by freshman Adelyn Moore.

Throughout the summer and the beginning of practice, the Wildcats have worked Moore into the varsity lineup and she has learned a lot along the way from her senior counterpart.

"Megan and Adelyn will be 'co-piloting' our team this year as our setters," Willer said. "Running a system with two setters allows us to bring in more offensive weapons and a stronger defensive look as we will be able to have bigger blockers with our right sides against other team's outside hitters. Megan and Adelyn have done an awesome job this summer working together to create a cohesive style for our players, so that hitter/setter connections can be established."



Louisburg senior setter Megan Quinn eclipsed the 1,000 assist mark last season.

“I love having Megan there to mentor Adelyn and show her the ropes with the varsity team, and Adelyn is stepping up with no hesitation to play at a high level right away. We are very excited about this duo for the season.”

Other than Sword and Williams, the Wildcats will have some new faces at the net. They feature a pair of middle hitters in senior Izzy Moreland and junior Evyn Richardson. Moreland has seen some varsity time the last two seasons, Richardson is in her first season at varsity, while sophomore McKenna Lohse could also see some varsity time there.

Sophomore Caileigh Kilgore and senior Katie Elpers will swing from the right side this year, as will sophomore Delaney Nelsen, who is recovering from an injury. Nelsen also saw some

varsity playing time last season.

Defensively, the Wildcats will be anchored by a pair of seniors. Bronwynn Williams will be the team's starting libero, while Ashlyn Berck will start as a defensive specialist. Both players were in the varsity rotation at times last season and Williams saw playing time in 25 matches.

"The strength of this team will be our athleticism and versatility," Willer said. "We have girls at all positions who could play a variety of positions on the court, and we have very strong offensive weapons who can be a threat from anywhere. With one lineup, we are able to get a lot of different looks offensively, which works to our advantage. Additionally, running a two-setter system allows us to have more hitters on the court at all times, and we have the depth to be really strong across the board."

Although the Wildcats have several new faces on the court this season, they still have the same goal, and that is to end their season at the state tournament in Hutchinson.

"As a team, we are maintaining high expectations for ourselves based on last year's finish," Willer said. "While we recognize areas for growth and improvement, we are returning with confidence that we can get back to the state tournament again at the end of the season if we play to our potential. The key for us is to maintain high expectations without putting too much pressure on ourselves. We plan to take the season one day at a time, focusing on just one match at a time and getting better every day."

Louisburg will begin that journey today as the Wildcats host Baldwin for a Frontier League dual. Varsity is slated to begin around 6:30 p.m.

"Practices have been going well," Willer said. "At all three levels, we have a great energy and sense of competitiveness every time we walk into the gym, and the girls are getting

after it with a sense of purpose. I think we are all amped and ready for the season to truly begin this week. Getting a few games under our belt is always good so that we can have specific things to focus on each practice.”