

Wildcats fall in home opener to Baldwin in four sets



Louisburg senior Madie Williams sends the ball over the net Tuesday during the Wildcats' season opener against Baldwin at Louisburg High School.

In its season opener Tuesday, Louisburg found itself in a rematch of the sub-state championship match from a season ago.

The Wildcats hosted Baldwin, a team they defeated on their way to a fourth-place state tournament finish.

Unfortunately for Louisburg, the result wasn't quite the same this time around.

Baldwin won the first two sets and held on for a 3-1 victory (25-20, 25-18, 19-25, 27-25) over Louisburg. Despite the early deficit, the Wildcats battled back to almost force a fifth set.

"I thought we played pretty well for the first match of the year," Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. "We saw some nerves for sure in that first set, but I think we settled in pretty well and fought hard throughout the match. There were some impressive rallies and great plays made by both teams, which made for a fun night. Regardless of the outcome, I am proud of how hard we fought and how we stayed together working as a team throughout the match."

Through the first two sets, the Wildcats had a tough time

slowing down the Bulldog attack at the net – more specifically Fisayo Afonja.

The Baldwin senior, who is one of the top players in Class 4A this season, made an impact all over the floor. Afonja finished with a team-high 31 kills and also had 21 digs with her play in the back row as she made things difficult on the Wildcats.

“She is a truly impressive player all around,” Willer said of Afonja. “The toughest thing about her is that she can come from anywhere and hit any tempo set. She also has a crazy high vertical, and with that extra hang time she can turn in the air to find the open court. We started to do a better job of finding her in the third and fourth sets to put up a better block, so that helped us compete better with their strong offense.”



Louisburg seniors Katie Elpers (left) and Izzy Moreland team up for a block Tuesday against Baldwin.

The Wildcats got out to a shaky start with the back-to-back 25-20 and 25-18 losses, but gathered themselves and put together a strong performance the rest of the way.

After a convincing 25-19 win in the third set, Louisburg found itself in a back-and-forth match with the Bulldogs, but after forcing extra points, fell 27-25.

Louisburg senior Madie Williams had a big night to lead the Wildcats as she finished with a team-high 26 kills as she had plenty of opportunities from both the front and back rows. She also led the team defensively with 19 digs.

"Madie had an awesome night," Willer said. "She established herself early, and continued to be the go to hitter for both of our setters. They know that they can give the ball to her at any time and she's going to make the most of it. I was also pleased to see her court awareness shine through as she made some very smart decisions with her attack choices. She's not afraid to go up and take a huge swing or mix in a tip, and we saw how successful that can be.

"Additionally, I thought she passed very well and made some big plays on defense. She has a natural ability to read the court and anticipate what's coming next, which is huge for us."

It was also the first time the Wildcats implemented their two-setter offense with senior Megan Quinn and freshman Adelyn Moore. Quinn finished with a team-high 25 assists and Moore had 19 of her own. Quinn also had a strong game defensively with 12 digs.

"I think they both did a great job," Willer said. "They spread the ball around, but also found a way to find our hot hitters as much as they could. I love seeing their relationship in between plays, time outs, and sets as well. Megan is a wonderful leader and has really taken Adelyn under her wing to help our team be the best we can be."

Senior Hailey Sword also had a big game at the net with 11 kills, and defensively she was second on the team with 17 digs.



Louisburg libero Bronwynn Williams chases down a ball Tuesday against Baldwin.

Also on defense, senior libero Bronwynn Williams tallied 17 digs, while senior Izzy Moreland finished with a team-high five blocks from her middle blocker spot.

“I thought our serve receive passing was pretty strong for the majority of the night, and I loved our defensive effort,” Willer said. “I think every person on the floor stepped up in moments where they were able to shine a little bit, so I love seeing that well-rounded aspect of our team.”

Louisburg will try and bounce back today as the Wildcats travel to De Soto for a triangular with Olathe West. Matches

begin at 5 p.m.