

BACK-TO-BACK: Wildcats win second straight sub-state title



Senior Ashlyn Berck hoists the Class 4A sub-state championship plaque Saturday following Louisburg's 2-0 win over Independence at Independence High School.

INDEPENDENCE – Louisburg has a prolific history when it comes to making the state volleyball tournament.

The Wildcats added that resume Saturday in Independence.

Louisburg, the No. 7 seed, rolled through No. 2 Independence in the sub-state championship match, 25-17 and 25-20, to earn its second straight sub-state title. The Wildcats defeated No. 10 Paola, 25-22 and 25-18, in semifinals

“It meant so much to win sub-state, especially with this team,” Louisburg senior Megan Quinn said. “I have so much love for this team and I was not ready to say goodbye to the girls yet. I felt that our team played really good all around on Saturday and that we connected the best we have all season.”

The Wildcats are no stranger to one of volleyball's biggest stages as this will be the 20th time in school history that they have qualified for the state tournament.



Members of the Louisburg sub-state championship team are (front row, from left) Madie Williams, Izzy Moreland, Ashlyn Berck, Megan Quinn, Hailey Sword, Katie Elpers; (back row) managers Hanna Veres and Kira Kundt, McKenna Lohse, Evyn Richardson, Caileigh Kilgore, Adelyn Moore, Delaney Nelsen, Aspen Coulter and head coach Leanna Willer.

“Winning back-to-back sub-state championships is not an easy feat, and we are so proud of this team for pushing through different adversities all season long and coming together on Saturday to leave it all out on the floor,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “We are so excited to continue the tradition of excellence in volleyball in Louisburg and to represent our school and community at the state tournament.”

Their quest for a state tournament berth began with Paola in the sub-state semifinals – a team they had beaten twice already this year – and the Wildcats found themselves with

their back's against the wall early.

Paola held an 18-13 advantage in the first set and had all the momentum. A loss for Louisburg would have meant they would have had to win the next two.

Instead, the Wildcats made the plays when they needed them most.

Senior Madie Williams started the run with a kill and an ace, then dug a ball up on a return, setter Adelyn Moore chased it down and then Izzy Moreland reached down and sent the ball over the net with her fist. That led a Paola error and another point.

Moreland followed it up with a block and then Paola sent a hit out of bounds and the match was tied at 18-all. The Panthers responded to take the next two points, but the Wildcats rallied again.



Sophomore Delaney Nelsen dives to dig up a ball Saturday at

Independence.

Sophomore McKenna Lohse got a kill from the right side and senior Ashlyn Berck followed with an ace to tie it at 20. Paola responded with a kill to make it 21-20, but Lohse tied it up with a kill over own.

The Wildcats ended the match on a 4-1 run after a tip by senior Hailey Sword, a kill from Williams and a tip from sophomore Caileigh Kilgore. That win put all the pressure on Paola.

“It is really tough to beat a team three times in a row, especially a team like Paola as they have grown over the season,” Williams said. “Overall, I think staying calm and letting our team know that we would be fine as long as we continued to give 100 percent effort throughout the rest of the set really helped give us the winning mindset. We all reminded each other to keep the energy up and just erase those past mistakes, and that’s what really got us to the championship.”

Louisburg didn’t let up in the second set as the Wildcats jumped out to an 8-3 lead and never looked back. Paola cut the lead to one on a couple different occasions, but the Wildcats were able to hold on.

Williams led the Wildcats from her all-around position as she finished with 11 kills and tied for a team-high eight digs. Sword was second on the team with eight digs, while sophomore Delaney Nelsen and Lohse each added four.



Louisburg senior Megan Quinn sets up a teammate for a kill Saturday at Independence.

Quinn and freshman Adelyn Moore set up their hitters well. Quinn had a team-high 14 assists and Moore finished with 10. Moore also had eight digs.

“Beating any team three times is a challenge, and our rivalry with Paola always results in a high energy, competitive match,” Willer said. “We knew that they would come at us with everything they had, and they sure did. I think our nerves were apparent in that first set as it took us a little while to find our groove, but getting the comeback victory in set 1 was a huge momentum builder for us and it carried over into the second set giving us that extra push to finish the game in two.”

Against Independence in the championship, it was all

Louisburg. Sword led the way with a team-high 12 kills. Lohse finished with five and Williams added four of her own.

Defensively, Moreland had a team-high three blocks in the tournament, while Williams had a team-best nine digs.

Moore had a team-high 12 assists and Quinn added eight to go along with six digs.



Louisburg senior Madie Williams goes up for a block.

The Wildcats also thrived from behind the service line with eight aces, including two each from Moore and Nelsen.

“It meant everything to me that we won substate, given me another week to play with my family,” Sword said. “I think the team played pretty well with ups and downs, but this team is definitely playing better every time we get on the court. I am super excited for state.”

It was an all-around team effort for Louisburg on the day and

it started up front with Sword and Williams. The impacts continued on down the roster.

“Hailey and Madie both had great games on Saturday as they were our attack leaders and both made big plays in the back row and in serve receive,” Willer said. “They are asked to do a lot for our team as six-rotation players, so their leadership and dependability on the court is very important to the success of our team.

“Megan and Adelyn both ran our offense according to our game plan and did a great job of finding our hitters at the right time in the right place. Ashlyn had a great day on serve receive and McKenna stepped up big-time on the right side for us and had two great games. Delaney served tough all day long, led the team in aces, and did a great job getting the other teams out-of-system. Izzy did a great job being big at the net and leading the team in blocks.”



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword had a team-high 12 kills against

Independence on Saturday.

Now, the Wildcats will prepare for the state tournament as they open with pool play Friday at the Hutchinson Sports Arena.

Louisburg earned the No. 6 seed and will square off with No. 3 McPherson first at 3:30 p.m. The Wildcats will then meet Towanda-Circle at 6:30 and No. 7 Holton at 7:30.

The top two teams in each pool will advance to the state semifinals at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

“Friday will bring some big match-ups for us, as the state tournament should,” Willer said. “McPherson is historically a very successful volleyball team and they have a lot of experience at the state tournament. We are looking forward to facing Towanda-Circle again this year. That is a team who just seemed to have our number last year, so our girls are fired up to avenge last year’s team.

“Lastly, Holton will be a great match-up for us. They upset the No. 1 seed in the East in Rock Creek at sub-state, so we are excited to have the opportunity to play them. We are going to need to be playing our best volleyball together as a team to finish in the top 2 in our pool to move on to Saturday’s bracket.”