Wildcats looking forward to challenge of state tourney



The Louisburg volleyball team is hoping for another celebration like this one following the Class 4A Kansas State Volleyball Championship this weekend in Hutchinson.

Louisburg is no stranger to the state volleyball tournament, especially after the Wildcats punched their ticket for the 20th time in school history following last Saturday's sub-state victory.

Going to state is more of an expectation than anything else for Louisburg, but that doesn't mean the excitement level is anything but high going into this weekend Class 4A Kansas State Volleyball Championships in Hutchinson.

The Wildcats are making their second straight trip to the state tournament, and it's 10th time in the last 13 years. As much fun as a sub-state title is, they have shifted their focus on the task at hand.

"As soon as we walked in the gym on Monday, we were focused on state," Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. "We are very excited about the sub-state wins, but we have been working all

week in getting ready for Friday and right now we are focused on ourselves and how we can get better.”

No. 6 Louisburg (24-14) opens pool play at 3:30 p.m. on Friday when it faces No. 3 McPherson (29-9) at Hutchinson Sports Arena. The top two teams in each pool will advance to the state semifinals Saturday afternoon.

Experience could play a role in the Wildcats’ success this weekend as they return three starters from last season’s team that placed fourth at state.

Senior setter Megan Quinn, along with all-around players Hailey Sword and Madie Williams, played big parts on both teams and that experience could be vital.



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword runs in to dig up a ball last week at sub-state.

“Definitely having that experience settles some of our younger players,” Quinn said. “We have been there before so we kind of

know what to expect. I even had older sisters that played at state and was there to watch them, so we know what it is going to be like and we know what it is going to take to win there. We had some good matches there last year and we want to come out on top this time.”

Similar to a season ago, the Wildcats got off to a slow start, but were able to find their footing come postseason time and they hope that momentum carries over into state.

“Last year going to state, we showed that we don’t have to be the biggest or the best team, we just have to work our butt off and compete,” Sword said. “We have tried to pass that on to some of the younger players this year. We might not look the best, but we can compete with anyone out there.”

The Wildcats appeared to find the right combination last Saturday as they earned a sweep over Paola and then against Independence in the sub-state championship.

With Sword, Williams and sophomore Delaney Nelsen playing all the way around, the Wildcats have also run a 2-setter system all season with Quinn and freshman Adelyn Moore.



Senior libero Ashlyn Berck digs up a ball during sub-state last week.

Louisburg also has strong defense in the back with senior libero Ashlyn Berck and senior Izzy Moreland as the team's middle blocker with Nelsen. Sophomores Caileigh Kilgore and McKenna Lohse have also stepped up as the team's right side

hitters.

“It did take awhile for us to find our groove and figure out the right fit of girls out on the court,” Willer said. “It is still changing a little bit, but what they have done a good job of is no matter who is out there, they are going to figure it out and make the best of it. I started to see a little bit of change in the Ottawa tournament and I think the girls realized what is going to make us successful. Then especially on Senior Night it showed even more. Tonganoxie is a great team, we were pretty solid during that whole game.”

The Wildcats will have to come together once more to start pool play Friday as they play another team that is familiar to the state tournament – McPherson. The Bullpups are also making their 20th trip to state.

Louisburg will then face Towanda-Circle at 6:30 p.m. – a team that defeated the Wildcats three times last season – including twice at the state tournament. The Wildcats will end pool play at 7:30 against Holton.

“McPherson has a history of being strong at volleyball,” Willer said. “They are a program like us where they have a history of being solid every year, and even though their record hasn’t been like what it has in the past, they have that sense of tradition like we do. Going to state is an expectation and the goal. We have tried to watch as much film as we can and I think it will be a good matchup for us.

“Circle we know from last year and they easily won their sub-state. They seemed to have our number last year, so hopefully this group can come out and avenge what happened a year ago. Holton pulled an upset in their sub-state and we were in that similar position last year. They will come ready to play and they have some height so we are going to have to work getting around the block. We are just focusing on bettering what we can control and how we can improve.”



Louisburg senior Izzy Moreland goes up for a kill last week at sub-state.

Throw in teams from the other pool – No. 1 Clearwater (35-3), No. 4 Eudora (23-8), No. 5 Andale (27-10) and No. 8 Bishop Miege (19-17) – and it looks to be a competitive state tournament.

“Everyone there has a good chance at getting to the finals,” Williams said. “If we just stay focused, I think we have as good of a chance as anyone there. We can’t look at what team is ranked what and worry about that, we just need to go out and play our best volleyball in order to beat everyone. We can’t take anyone for granted and anyone can beat us. At the same time, I think if we play well we can beat anyone.”

As for what the Wildcats will have to do to be successful, it all starts with defense.

“We have to win the serve and pass game and that is what everything comes down to,” Willer said. “We have been working

really hard on defense. We have the offensive tools when our passing and defense is there. Even if things aren’t going our way, we just need to find a way to regroup and shake it off and refocus. We can’t let the moment get too big.”