

Wildcats battle their way to fourth place state finish



The Louisburg volleyball team celebrates a big point during the Class 4A Kansas State Volleyball Championships on Friday in Hutchinson.

HUTCHINSON – For the second time in as many years, Louisburg is leaving the state volleyball tournament with some hardware.

The Wildcats, for the second straight season, finished fourth Saturday at the Class 4A Kansas State Volleyball Championships in Hutchinson. It marked the 20th appearance for the Wildcats in the tournament.

Getting that hardware and making it to Saturday was certainly a battle for the Wildcats, who had to fight through adversity during pool play on Friday. Louisburg had to deal with injuries and had its fate rest in another team's hands.

Despite all that, Louisburg left with a fourth place medal following a tough 23-25, 25-8 and 25-16 loss to Andale in the third-place match Saturday at Hutchinson Sports Arena.

“We are very proud of this team for making it back to the

state tournament and finishing in the final four again,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “We, of course, will always strive for higher finishes until we reach that ultimate goal of state champions, but we are proud of where we finished the season and were happy with the success of this team.”



Members of the Louisburg volleyball team are (from left) Adelyn Moore, Caileigh Kilgore, McKenna Lohse, Delaney Nelsen, Aspen Coulter, Evyn Richardson, Ashlyn Berck, Katie Elpers, Izzy Moreland, Megan Quinn, Hailey Sword, Madie Williams and head coach Leanna Willer.

Louisburg opened pool play on Friday against the eventual state-runner up in McPherson. The Wildcats lost in two sets, 25-22 and 25-18, and needed a win in its next match against No. 2 seed Towanda-Circle.

After Circle defeated Louisburg three times last season, the Wildcats got their revenge in a competitive 26-24 and 25-22 victory. A win in their next match against Holton would have given the Wildcats a spot in the semifinals.

However, after Louisburg took the first set 31-29, Holton won the next two, 25-22 and 25-19. Midway through the match, senior Madie Williams also suffered an ankle injury and had to sit the rest of the match and on Saturday.

“Watching a player get injured is always heartbreaking, and especially a senior at the state tournament,” Willer said. “It was emotional for everyone, knowing how badly Madie wanted to finish out the season. That being said, we have a team of 12 fully capable girls, so it was great to see other players step in and rise to the occasion in her place. Every role on the team is vital, and it just goes to show that you never know when it will be your time to shine.”



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword sends a shot over the net Friday against McPherson.

That loss left Louisburg's record at 1-2 and many of the

players had come to the realization that their season was over. The Wildcats needed McPherson to beat Circle in two sets in its next match to win the tiebreaker between Circle and Holton.

McPherson was happy to oblige as it defeated Circle, 2-0, and the Wildcats were onto the state semifinals.

“Friday’s pool play round was a bit crazy – it’s not often we see a three-way 1-2 tie like we had,” Willer said. “When we lost that last set to Holton, I know the girls were extremely upset, but our first message to them was that there’s still a chance of us making it. It’s always sad to think that this could be the last time we played together, but we were so glad to have the opportunity to play together for one more day. All of us coaches had a really good feeling that it would happen, especially considering how great McPherson had been playing all day. They beat Circle in two sets and sealed the deal for us to continue on to Saturday.”

The Wildcats’ reward for making it to Saturday – facing off with the defending state champion, Bishop Miege, in the semifinals. The Stags handed Louisburg a 25-10 and 25-17 loss and the Wildcats moved to the third place game against Andale.



Louisburg senior Izzy Moreland converges at the net with two Andale players Saturday in Hutchinson.

Louisburg's loss to Miego didn't get them down as the Wildcats responded to take the first set against Andale, but the Indians rallied to win the next two.

"We came out fired up for that third place match," Willer said. "We started off very strong from the service line and we were successful in taking them out of system, which allowed us to set up a strong defense and convert it to offense. In the second set, Andale came back firing on all cylinders, which took us back a little bit. It took us some time to get back in our groove and feeling confident, but I am proud of how hard we fought in the third. Regardless of the score and the outcome, we wanted to enjoy our last game together and give it our all."

Several Wildcats contributed to the successful state tournament and it started at the net. Senior Hailey Sword led the Wildcats offensive attack with 32 kills and sophomore Caileigh Kilgore added 29.

Williams had 23 kills in limited action, while sophomore Delaney Nelsen finished with 18.



Louisburg setter Megan Quinn sends the ball over the net Friday during pool play.

The Wildcat hitters were given good opportunities thanks to setters Megan Quinn and Adelyn Moore. Quinn led Louisburg with 61 assists in her final match and Moore tallied 54.

Louisburg was also strong from behind the service line as Moore had a team-high seven aces in the five matches and Sword added six.

Defensively, senior Izzy Moreland played big up front with a team-high five blocks, while Nelsen and sophomore McKenna Lohse each had four.

Nelsen also registered a team-best 40 digs and senior libero Ashlyn Berck had 34. Sword had 33 and Williams finished with 31.