

# Wildcat volleyball hopes for a third straight trip to state tourney



***Louisburg junior Caileigh Kilgore is one of five returning players for the Louisburg volleyball team this season.***

It has been a successful run for the Louisburg volleyball team the last two seasons as the Wildcats have finished fourth in the state in each of those years.

However, this group will look a little different than the last two.

Gone are six seniors from last season's squad and most people would think it would be a transition year for Louisburg. The

Wildcats hope that isn't the case as five seniors return to lead this year's group and they also bring back five players that were a part of that 2023 team.

It is a little different dynamic as the Wildcats have seniors who will be seeing their first varsity action, while they also have underclassmen return who played big roles on last year's team.

"We are in a unique situation," Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. "People would assume that graduating six seniors, who all played regularly would leave us in a rebuilding situation, but we return a setter, two pin hitters, and two middles that all saw significant varsity court time last year. Having their varsity experience back is huge for us, and will be complemented well by the rest of the varsity group that is stepping up into new roles.

"Some of the seniors and underclassmen were a part of a JV team last year that was really, really good. They were tough to beat and took down 5A and 6A opponents throughout the season. We feel really confident that this group is fully ready for that varsity competition, and I don't expect them to miss a beat. We are lucky to have some depth at a lot of positions again this year, so the competition in our gym has been great so far. We aim to keep challenging each other each day in practice to raise our overall level of play."



***Louisburg sophomore Adelyn Moore will take the reins of the Wildcat offense as the team's setter this season.***

After running a 6-2 offense with two setters last season, the Wildcat will revert back to the traditional 5-1 as sophomore Adelyn Moore returns after sharing the setting responsibilities last season as a freshman.

Willer is excited to see what Moore can do this season after learning under former teammate Megan Quinn last year.

"Adelyn is a very strong setter, and a fun player to watch for sure," Willer said. "Stepping onto the varsity court as a freshman isn't an easy thing to do, but she handled everything in stride and learned a lot from Megan last year as well. Already this summer, we have seen her step up into that full-time setter role by taking more ownership of the court and the offense that we will run."



“She is a bit like our Energizer Bunny as she is constantly flying all over the court to make big plays for her teammates. She is becoming more confident in her leadership role and we are looking forward to seeing her shine in all six rotations this season.”

The Wildcats bring back a lot of experience at the net as juniors Delaney Nelsen and Caileigh Kilgore return as outside hitters, while another junior Addi Mallett and senior Katie McKain could see time on the front row.



***Louisburg junior Delaney Nelsen returns for her third year on the varsity level.***

Nelsen has been on the varsity squad the last two seasons and has been a six-rotation player for the Wildcats. However, she is making her way back from an injury in the offseason and Willer is looking forward to what she and Kilgore will bring to the team this year.

“Both Delaney and Caileigh, along with Adelyn, have been

recognized as players to watch as they made the AVCA Phenom Watchlist that highlights underclassmen (non-seniors) that are already making big waves,” Willer said. “Delaney is a great all-around player that has the versatility to play pretty much anywhere on the court. As she is still working back into the front row, she has really improved her passing, defense, and setting. She’s the type of player that is ready and willing to play any position and she has the talent to do it.

“Caileigh likely has one of the most powerful swings we will see in 4A. She’s got a great arm, and the connection between her and Adelyn has helped to highlight her abilities this summer. She has moved from the right side to the outside for us, so she will be more involved in our serve receive and defensive patterns, and she’s worked hard to build her confidence in all-around skills so that we can keep her on the court as much as possible to give us some great offense.”

Louisburg also returns familiarity in the middle. Senior Evyn Richardson is the lone senior that saw varsity time last season, while junior McKenna Lohse will join Richardson as the team’s middle blocker as both played big minutes last season.

“We are glad to have both Evyn and Kenna as strong middle blockers, and we are thankful that they both had significant time in the middle and on the right side last year,” Willer said. “Working on both positions increased their versatility and provides us with more options offensively as they are comfortable hitting from multiple areas. Their experience from last year will help us as they are already used to the varsity pace, and both girls can impact the game from a defensive and offensive perspective.”



***Louisburg senior Aspen Coulter will serve as the team's libero this season.***

Defensively, the Wildcats will feature new players in the back row. Senior Aspen Coulter is the team's new libero, after playing that position the last two years on the junior varsity level.

Seniors Ally Brown and Jaden Bentz will serve as defensive specialists, while Nelsen, Kilgore and Mallett could also see time in the back as well.

"We did lose many of our dig leaders from last season, but we feel that our girls are ready to step up to the challenge, and we have a lot of girls who can fill those positions," Willer said. "Aspen has been the JV libero for the last two seasons and will start this year taking on that role for the varsity group. Ally and Jaden have also been putting in the time this

summer as defensive specialists.

“Additionally, we have three pin hitters that can hold their own in the back row with Delaney, Caileigh and Addi. All six girls are strong contenders for those positions, and we feel confident that all six would do a great job to step up and make big plays whenever their number is called.”

Like with most seasons, the Wildcats’ goal is to make the state tournament and it has been a fun ride for the last two years. It is a ride they aren’t ready to get off anytime soon.

“Naturally, our main goal is to get back to the state tournament,” Willer said. “Although Louisburg has traditionally found its way there, that is no easy task. We want to see our girls continue to work hard and improve throughout the season so that we are playing our best volleyball at the end of October. If we are fortunate enough to make it to the state tournament, we are setting our sights on making it to day two and finishing higher than fourth place.

“At the moment, our goal is to take it day by day and to not take any opportunity for granted. We are fortunate to get to play strong competition every chance we get to play, so our main focus will only be on one game at a time.”

The Wildcats will open their season Tuesday when they travel to Baldwin for a Frontier League dual. Their home opener is Thursday as they host De Soto and Olathe West for a triangular.