

Wildcats rally together to win season opener at Baldwin



The Louisburg volleyball team celebrates following a point Tuesday during the Wildcats' win at Baldwin.

BALDWIN CITY – Losing the first set on the road in your opening match wasn't the most ideal way to start the 2024 season for the Louisburg volleyball team.

However, instead of putting their heads down, the Wildcats rallied around each other in what was a difficult road environment Tuesday against Baldwin.

Louisburg put together three straight set victories and came away with a 3-1 victory over the Bulldogs in its season opener.

"The first match of the season can really set the tone for the year," Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. "We were looking to start off on a positive note, and coming out of Baldwin with a win has us starting off the season in a great place with a little more confidence built in each other."

"Baldwin is a tough place to play. The gym is loud, and they have a great student section to give them a lot of energy. We were eventually able to embrace the energy in the gym and let it fuel us in the final three sets to get the win."

The Wildcats dug themselves a hole they couldn't get out of in the first set in a 25-17 loss. Baldwin carried that momentum and took a 10-5 lead into the second set.

Louisburg responded with a 7-2 run to tie the set at 12-all. Sophomore Adelyn Moore then served back-to-back aces to put the Wildcats up 16-14 and eventually won 25-19 to tie the match.

"I'll admit that the first set had me holding my breath a little bit," Willer said. "Those first game jitters were very much apparent and we made way more errors than we would like. Our main focus toward the end of the set was to build momentum to carry over into set 2 and take care of our side of the game."

"Baldwin was a very scrappy team and we had a tough time finding ways to put the ball down. That being said, there were some really fun long rallies with great plays made on both sides of the court, so it was an exciting first game."



Louisburg junior McKenna Lohse goes up for a kill Tuesday against Baldwin.

Junior McKenna Lohse helped give the Wildcats a big advantage in the third set with a kill, two aces and served five straight points to put them up 6-1. Baldwin eventually rallied to take a 22-20 lead late.

However, a Bulldog error and an Addison Mallett kill tied it up at 22. Baldwin scored another point, but the Wildcats took the last three on a Baldwin error, a Lohse kill and a block by junior Caileigh Kilgore.

That swung all the momentum to the Wildcat sideline and they were able to cruise in the fourth set in the 25-15 victory and took the best-of-five match.

Moore had a big night for the Wildcats in several areas. She ran the offense with a team-high 29 assists, and also had six

kills, two aces and 10 digs.

Lohse also played well for Louisburg as she had a team-high four aces, to go along with a team-high three blocks and five kills.

“Both Adelyn and Kenna had great performances, and their connection really seemed to shine in the final sets,” Willer said. “We definitely had some players step up big behind the service line for us, and those two along with Ally Brown led the team in aces. Consistent, aggressive serving is something we spent a lot of time on this summer, so it was nice to see our servers take ownership of that last night.”



Louisburg junior Addison Mallett follows through for a kill Tuesday against Baldwin.

Several Wildcats contributed to the win at the net and in the back row.

Junior Addison Mallett led the team in kills with 10, while Kilgore and senior Evyn Richardson each had nine and eight, respectively.

Defensively, senior libero Aspen Coulter finished with a team-high 18 digs, while senior Ally Brown finished with 16 digs and also had three aces on the night. Senior Jaden Bentz was also double figures in digs with 11.

Willer was pleased to see her entire team come together and battle through adversity in just their first game of the season.

“Coming back from a first set loss is no easy task, but we worked hard to focus on only one point at a time,” Willer said. “As the night went on, we really started to mesh better and better together, and we were able to capitalize on the opportunities in front of us thanks to the great energy in the gym. Our players on the court were fired up, our players on the bench were fired up, our younger players in the stands in the student section were fired up, and our parents/crowd really backed this team.

“The comeback highlighted the tenacity and grit we know our players have, and we loved to see it showcased in the first game of the season. We have high hopes for what this team can do.”

Louisburg is back in action tonight as the Wildcats host De Soto and Olathe West in its home opener. First match is set for 5 p.m.