

Wildcats capture Frontenac Invite championship



The Louisburg volleyball team celebrates match point of the championship match Saturday at the Frontenac Invitational.

FRONTENAC – Louisburg volleyball had a difficult schedule through its first six matches of the season, that included two-ranked opponents, and it lost four of them.

Despite its rough start, Louisburg showed out in its first tournament of the season Saturday at the Frontenac Invitational. The Wildcats won all five matches, including a 25-19, 26-24 win over Pittsburg in the championship, to capture the tournament title.

Following a league victory Thursday over Ottawa, the Wildcats have now won six straight and are starting to build momentum on the young season.

“This was a great start to the tournament season,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “We were really glad to get back on the winning side of our games, and it definitely helped build our confidence as a team. We battled through a couple of three set matches to start the day and worked hard to come back in the third to take them after dropping those second sets.

“Coming home with a first place plaque to display in the front of the school is always a good feeling and we have set team goals to not let that be the only hardware we come home with.”

The Wildcats (7-4) got off to a little bit of a slow start as they defeated Cherryvale in three sets, 25-19, 18-25 and 25-12. They went three sets again in their next pool play match against Fort Scott, but again came away with a 25-19, 23-25 and 25-15 victory.

Louisburg won its pool after a 25-19 and 26-24 victory over St. Mary’s-Colgan, and once the Wildcats reached bracket play, they stepped it up.



The Louisburg volleyball team poses with its championship plaque Saturday in Frontenac. Members of the team are (front row, from left) Aspen Coulter, Katie McKain, Ally Brown, Eryn Richardson, Jaden Bentz; (back row) coach Leanna Willer, Caileigh Kilgore, Adelyn Moore, Delaney Nelsen, Rylee Telken, McKenna Lohse and Addison Mallett.

“In our final two matches of the day, we hit a point where we decided that we weren’t going to let ourselves go to three again,” Willer said. “We wanted to focus on our side of the net and take care of business – trusting everyone to do their job and get us where we wanted to be. Thanks to some great serving, we were able to string together a few runs in each set to make that happen.”

It was the serving that lifted the Wildcats past a pair of good opponents in Girard and Pittsburg.

Louisburg defeated Girard, 25-21 and 25-18, to reach the championship match in big thanks to its performance from behind the service line.

After the first set win, sophomore Adelyn Moore and senior Ally Brown helped serve the Wildcats to an 8-1 advantage in the second. However, Girard battled back and eventually tied the match at 15.

Brown once again put the Wildcats back on top as she served five straight points, including three aces, to put Louisburg up 21-15 and the Wildcats were able to pull away. Brown finished with five aces in the match.

The serves helped set up kill opportunities from Addison Mallett and Evyn Richardson, who helped continue the run.

“Serving was a big part of our success in the latter half of the day,” Willer said. “We continuously talk about winning the serve and pass game, and we were able to serve aggressively – especially in those last two matches to give us an advantage over each team. Ally’s serve came up huge for us in the semi-final game against Girard. That stretch included three aces and some other killer serves that set us up for success.”



Junior Caileigh Kilgore goes up for a kill Saturday in Frontenac.

Mallett led the Wildcats at the net in that match with six kills and four blocks, while junior Caileigh Kilgore had five kills and Richardson had three blocks. Junior McKenna Lohse had four kills and two blocks.

Moore, the team's setter, ran the offense well with 17 assists. Defensively, senior libero Aspen Coulter led Louisburg with nine digs and senior Jaden Bentz added seven.

The good serving continued in the championship match against Pittsburg.

Coulter, Moore and Lohse all put together key serving runs to give the Wildcats the early lead. Coulter had two aces in the match, while Moore and junior Delaney Nelsen each had one.

“In the championship, Aspen, Adelyn, and Kenna had a combined total of 30 serves, which were all aggressive enough to push Pittsburg out of system as much as we could,” Willer said. “When we are tough behind the service line, we are much tougher to beat.”

Lohse was big for Louisburg at the net in the championship match as she posted a team-high seven kills and junior Rylee Telken added five of her own.

Defensively, Coulter was all over the floor with a team-high 16 digs, while Kilgore and Brown had seven and six, respectively.

For the tournament, the Wildcats had 31 aces in the five matches. Nelsen led the way with seven aces, while Brown finished with six. Coulter and Moore each had five of their own.

Moore had a busy day running the offense and doing a little bit of everything from the setter spot. She tallied 108 assists in the five matches to go along with 26 digs and 15 kills.

“Throughout the whole day, we ran a really balanced attack,” Willer said. “Adelyn did a great job of distributing the ball and finding our hot hitters when we needed a kill, and she threw in a few of her own as well. It was really nice to see that if one of our hitters was struggling, we were able to find others to step up and fill our offensive needs.”



Junior McKenna Lohse sends the ball back over the net on an over pass Saturday during the Frontenac Invitational.

Several Wildcats stepped up at the net as Kilgore led the way with 31 kills, while Lohse and Mallett had 29 and 25, respectively. Richardson added 18 kills, while Telken (13) and senior Katie McKain (12) also finished with double-digit kills.

Richardson posted a team-high 11 blocks on the day to lead the way defensively and Mallett had seven. In the back row, Coulter had a team-best 58 digs, while Brown finished 31.

It was exactly the kind of day the Wildcats were hoping for after a rough stretch to start the season.

“Throughout the day, I was constantly changing and tweaking our lineup to try out some different options and just get some different looks with our core group,” Willer said. “No matter

the lineup, our players adjusted and adapted to every different combination and found a way to mesh. Regardless of who was playing in the game or not, everyone remained supportive and encouraging of their teammates which made it a fun day for everyone.”

Wildcats sweep Ottawa in league dual

Before Saturday’s tournament, Louisburg was able to start a winning streak during Thursday’s home Frontier League dual against Ottawa.

Louisburg won the match in three sets, 25-19, 25-8 and 25-22, to move to 2-0 in league play.

The Wildcats got out to a rough start before Ottawa’s starting middle blocker, Dylan Nichols, had to leave midway through the first set with a serious leg injury.

“With the competitive nature of our league, securing those wins on league nights is really great,” coach Leanna Willer said. “It’s tough to do consistently in this league because we have so many strong teams. Ottawa started off really strong, and it was clear our girls were a little nervous heading into the first home league match, but we were making a comeback in the first set.

“Unfortunately, Ottawa did suffer an injury that took their team out of it for a little bit. We never want to see that happen to anyone, but Ottawa came back together and really put up a fight in the third set and it was good for us to remain strong as a team and get the win.”



Louisburg junior Delaney Nelsen rises up for a back row swing Thursday at home against Ottawa.

Louisburg was able to serve well again as it totaled eight aces, including three from junior McKenna Lohse.

Junior Caileigh Kilgore and Lohse were also strong at the net with 13 and 11 kills, respectively, while Moore had 30 assists on the night.

Defensively, junior Rylee Telken had three blocks to lead the Wildcats and senior Katie McKain had two. Senior libero Aspen Coulter had 18 digs to lead the Louisburg back row, while seniors Ally Brown and Jaden Bentz had eight and seven, respectively.

Wildcats drop pair of close matches to Trinity, Piper



Louisburg junior Rylee Telken tips the ball over the outstretched arms of a Piper player Tuesday at Piper.

KANSAS CITY, Kan. – It has been a difficult schedule so far for the Louisburg volleyball team and it continued Tuesday at Piper.

The Wildcats squared off with Piper, a Class 5A program, and Wichita-Trinity Academy, which is the No. 3 ranked team in Class 3A. Although they left with a pair of losses, Louisburg more than held its own.

Louisburg fell to Trinity 25-23 and 25-21, and then ended the night with 25-23 and 25-23 loss to Piper. The Wildcats had leads in both matches, but some rough stretches were too much to overcome.

“Overall, I was really proud of how our team played in the triangular,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “Both Trinity and Piper are really solid teams with wins over good teams thus far, so we knew we were in for some good matches. Losing sets by 2, then 4, then 2 and 2 points again is so frustrating because it feels like we are right there. We can taste that victory but we just couldn’t quite overcome the runs that we let each team go on in the end.”

Against Trinity, the Knights jumped out to a 22-14 lead in the first set, but the Wildcats made a run to make it interesting. Louisburg junior McKenna Lohse served seven straight points, had two aces, and the Wildcats got kills from Caileigh Kilgore, Addison Mallett and Rylee Telken to tie it up a 22-all.

Trinity would end up taking the set, but it gave the Wildcats some momentum for the second. Louisburg took a 14-10 lead behind kills from Mallett and Katie McKain.

The Knights would tie it at 14-all, but the Wildcats responded to take a 19-16 lead on kills from Adelyn Moore and Kilgore. Trinity responded with a run of their own to take a 21-19 lead and held on for the win.

Mallett led the Wildcats at the net with seven kills, while Kilgore finished with six. Defensively, Telken had two blocks, while Moore ran the offense with 22 assists.

Louisburg also had four aces in the match, including two from Lohse, who also had four kills. Senior Ally Brown led the Wildcat back row with 10 digs and an ace, while senior libero Aspen Coulter and Moore had eight and seven digs, respectively.



Louisburg sophomore Adelyn Moore recorded 36 assists in two matches on Tuesday at Piper.

In its match with Piper, Louisburg found itself down 23-15 in the first set, only to make another comeback. Moore served four straight points, and got a kill from Kilgore and block from Telken to make it 23-19.

Louisburg cut it to 24-23 as Brown served three straight points including an ace, but could get no closer.

Piper took another big 15-8 lead in the second set, but the Wildcats put together another run. Brown served four straight points including an ace, and after a block from Telken and a kill from Mallett, the Wildcats cut it to 15-13.

The Pirates widened their lead to 20-14 and were able to hold off Louisburg late.

Louisburg (1-4) wasn't at full strength as it was without senior middle blocker Eryn Richardson, who was sidelined with an injury. Telken came off the bench and responded as she led the Wildcats with four blocks and also had a pair of kills.

"Rylee stepped up in a huge way, and it was so fun to see her really shine in a position she hasn't played all year," Willer said. "She really loves the game and you can tell that she watches a lot of volleyball because of how well she can anticipate the next play. Her speed and agility were a big asset to us as well because she was able to put up a strong block against solid attackers from each team.

"I love the depth that this group of girls gives me. We have a lot of girls who can be versatile and excel in multiple positions and Tuesday was a great example of that."

Mallett and McKain each led the Louisburg attack with four kills each and Moore tallied 14 assists. Brown had the team's lone aces with two, while Moore and Coulter had nine and eight digs, respectively.

Piper did a lot of damage from behind the service line as it tallied 10 aces on the night, compared to just two for Louisburg.

The Wildcats will try and bounce back Thursday when they host Ottawa in a Frontier League dual. Varsity is set to begin at 6:30 p.m.

"Other than one, maybe two rough patches each set, we were playing some really great volleyball," Willer said. "So now, we are really focusing on what we can do as a team to cut teams off from those long runs and get the ball back in our servers' hands. We are all very much ready to get back on the winning side of the scoreboard."

Wildcats drop pair of matches to De Soto, Olathe West



Louisburg senior Evyn Richardson records a kill Thursday, against De Soto.

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However, the Wildcats' opponents proved to be no easy task as they faced off with De Soto, a Class 5A school, and Olathe West, which is ranked No. 4 in Class 6A.

It was definitely a step up in competition for Louisburg as

they dropped a pair of matches in a 2-1 loss to De Soto, and a 2-0 setback to Olathe West.

“For the most part, our team competed well against De Soto and Olathe West,” Willer said. “At the start of each match, we seemed a little shell shocked at the speed and pace of the game, but we started to figure them out and climb our way back into the game each time.

“Once we started with playing with confidence, I think we proved to ourselves that we can compete with these teams and make big plays. Unfortunately, we let each opponent go on a couple of big runs and we couldn’t quite come back to get a win.”

The Wildcats (1-2) opened the night against De Soto and got off to a rough start as they dropped the first set, 25-11. Louisburg responded nicely, however, with a 25-19 victory in the second to force a deciding third set.

Unfortunately for the Wildcats, De Soto went on a 9-1 run to open the third set and eventually won 25-16.

At the net, junior McKenna Lohse and Addison Mallett led the way with five kills each, while sophomore Adelyn Moore and junior Caileigh Kilgore each had three.

Senior Eryn Richardson led the Wildcat defense at the net with three blocks, while Moore ran the offense with 15 assists.

Defensively, senior libero Aspen Coulter led the way with seven digs, while senior Jaden Bentz and junior Delaney Nelsen each had four.

The Wildcats had seven aces in the match, including three from Lohse and two from Coulter.

Against Olathe West, the Wildcats had a tough time getting going against one of the best teams in Class 6A as they fell 25-11 and 25-17.

Lohse, Richardson and Kilgore each had three kills in the match, while Lohse and Moore both had two blocks. Moore also finished with 10 assists. Both players also led the team with four digs.

Louisburg will try and bounce back Tuesday when it travels to Piper for a triangular with Wichita-Trinity.

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.

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 Eryn 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 Eryn 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.

Dixon fights through injury to achieve pro volleyball dream



(Photo Courtesy of the University of Florida)

Anna Dixon didn't get a chance to finish her college volleyball career the way she wanted, but she persevered through injury to achieve her dream of playing professional volleyball.

It was setting up to be an epic finish to Anna Dixon's collegiate volleyball career.

Dixon, as a graduate transfer, made the move to the University of Florida for her final season and quickly made an impact on the Gators' roster.

Despite have to learn a new position due to an injury on the team, Dixon seemed to flourish. She helped the Gators out to a quick start and everything was going according to plan.

Then, the unthinkable happened.

Dixon suffered a season-ending elbow injury that put a premature end to her collegiate career. It was a devastating blow.

However, instead of sulking, Dixon worked that much harder to get back to the court and achieve her ultimate goal – playing professional volleyball.

All that hard work finally came to fruition back in July when Dixon, a 2019 Louisburg High School graduate, signed with the Atlanta Vibe, which is a part of the Pro Volleyball Federation.

“I am super excited to compete at the highest level, but also to be able to do that here in the US,” Dixon said. “It has been a dream of mine to be able to play professionally, in front of club girls who are in the same shoes that I was in many years ago. I am excited to give them the opportunity to have something to look forward to and work toward. Blessed for the opportunity and ready to get to work.”

Work is all Dixon has done to put herself in a position to achieve her lifelong dream.

After finishing her time with the University of Missouri volleyball program, Dixon transferred to Florida last year for her final season. She joined one of the top teams in the SEC and was looking forward to a postseason run.

An injury to a middle blocker left a void of the Gator team earlier that year, so Dixon volunteered to fill that role despite playing her entire college career on the outside.

Dixon, who stands at 6-foot-3, hadn't played middle blocker since middle school. She made the process look seamless as she helped the Gators to big early season wins as she vaulted up to No. 3 in the nation at one time.

After making that sacrifice, and finally getting comfortable with her new surroundings, injury struck in October. She quickly had to move from a vital piece on the court, to a cheerleader and assistant coach on the sideline.

“It was really hard seeing my season end so early, especially with the type of season the team was having,” Dixon said. “I was finally getting in the groove of playing in the middle and was figuring it out. I think I was playing the best I had ever played in my college career.

“I was surrounded by such amazing people. Whether I was playing middle, on the bench, playing all six rotations, or whether I was out with injury, it was such a positive, happy environment. I still found ways to contribute to the team even though I wasn’t on the court. I was very thankful for the support system that I had, and the recovery was tough, but I knew the hard work was going to pay off.”

The road to recovery wasn’t going to be an easy one.

For the next five months, Dixon would not only spend it rehabbing her injury, but doubts would start to creep in.

“There were ups and downs for sure,” Dixon said. “I was planning on going pro in January, then I was going through not being a collegiate athlete anymore, not being in school and going through an identity shape as well as rehab and training. A lot of people who are going through rehab always wonder how it is going to turn out and is it going to be the same. I just tried to focus on getting better each day. If it works out great, and if not we will figure out.

“There were certainly low moments for me, but I had an amazing support system that helped me through it and it made those days better.”



Better days were to come for Dixon and in July, she signed with the Vibe and her career as a professional has become to take shape.

Practice begins in December, while the season runs from January through May. The Vibe, along with the Pro Volleyball Federation, are currently in their second year of existence and Dixon is looking forward to making the move to Atlanta.

“I am excited to feel all the hard work I have put in with my recovery finally pay off,” she said. “I am excited to compete again. Sports gives you a feeling that I think nothing else

can give you when competing with your team. I am excited for that competition and to get after it. Also I'm ready to get down to Georgia. I have explored the city a couple times, so looking forward to getting to know the girls."

Dealing with a difficult injury changed Dixon's perspective on life, and more specifically, volleyball. It made her appreciate what is in front of her, including those that helped her through such a trying time.

"My biggest goal is not to take any opportunities on the court for granted," Dixon said. "I remember being out and watching practices every day, I would just think that when I get back out there I am just going to play with a free mind and never take anything for granted again. Now that I am training and practicing again, I am already feeling myself putting expectations on myself again. It is great to have goals, but as a player I am better when I am focused on the present moment and taking it one day at a time. I just want to continue that mindset throughout the season and do the best I can.

"I also have a wonderful support system around me and I couldn't have done it without them. I have grown tremendously in my faith throughout this past year. I have always known, that when I got hurt, His plans were going to be greater, whatever that may look like. I am just excited to see what those plans are for me in Atlanta."

Sword named Louisburg Sports

Zone Female Athlete of the Year



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword was named the 2024 Louisburg Sports Zone Female Athlete of the Year.

The Louisburg volleyball and girls soccer teams had memorable seasons last year.

Louisburg volleyball made the state tournament and came home with a fourth-place state medal. The girls soccer team also reached the state level as the Wildcats earned a regional championship and a spot in the state quarterfinals.

The common link for the two teams was senior Hailey Sword.

Sword played pivotal roles on both teams and those were big reasons why she was chosen as the 2024 Louisburg Sports Zone Female Athlete of the Year.

“The award means so much to me,” Sword said. “It really is a blessing that putting in hard work over the years could be recognized. I could not have been a successful athlete without the amazing coaching and support that I had.”

Sword, who will be playing volleyball at Graceland University this coming fall, was a big piece of the Louisburg volleyball team.

She played all six rotations for the Wildcats and was a big factor at the net and on defense. Sword tallied a team-high 308 kills and finished second on the team with 42 aces. Defensively, Sword was also strong in the back row as she was second on the team with 295 digs.

“As an overall athlete, Hailey has made a big impact in both of her main sports at LHS,” Louisburg volleyball coach Leanna Willer said. “Her natural athleticism made her stand out from the beginning, but her passion for each sport helped her to play both volleyball and soccer at an extremely high level. She had opportunities to play either one at the next level! We are so excited to see her continue her volleyball journey, and we’ll be supporting her 100 percent of the way.”

She was selected to the KVA All-State Tournament team after she helped Louisburg to a fourth place finish at state. Sword also earned honorable mention All-Frontier League honors.



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword poses with her athlete of the year plaque with coaches Ben York and Leanna Willer.

“Hailey has played a huge role in the volleyball team’s success during her time at LHS,” Willer said. “Each year her role changed slightly, but her competitive nature, aggressive swing, and ball control each made a big impact on the court. Eventually, we came to rely on her as a complete six rotation player available to be an offensive threat at all times and to make big defensive plays as well.

“Hailey figured out what her team needed and transformed into an electric player with a standout personality on the court that launched our state tournament run last year, and she continued to be a leader as a senior.”

On the pitch, Sword also found a lot of success. After helping Louisburg to the state quarterfinals, she earned a lot of individual honors.

Sword was named to the All-Frontier League first team as a defender and was selected second team all-state. She was a four-year letter winner and she was a part of a school record setting defense that allowed the fewest goals in a season. She also tallied three goals and two assists.

“Hailey was a team captain this year and our best leader on the field,” Louisburg coach Ben York said. “A late injury to a teammate forced her to play center back for us. She excelled in the role, all while we were transitioning into playing with two centerbacks from a sweeper/stopper formation from last year.”

She, like a lot of athletes, had to overcome adversity in both sports. However, Sword is appreciative of everything she, and her teammates, accomplished.

“Playing sports in Louisburg has been a great experience,” Sword said. “I learned so much about the sports that I participated in but also about life. Louisburg athletics really made me feel that I had a family and a place in Louisburg. I would not be the person I am today without the teams that I got to be a part of. It was not always perfect or what I maybe wanted, but I would not change a thing and it always worked out in the end.”

Previous winners:

2018: Isabelle Holtzen

2019: Carson Buffington

2020: Reilly Ratliff-Becher

2021: Alyse Moore

2022: Delaney Wright

2023: Adyson Ross

2024 Louisburg Sports Female Athlete of the Year Nominees



Seniors Izzy Moreland, Megan Quinn and Hailey Sword are the three finalists for the Louisburg Sports Zone Female Athlete of the Year Award

For the seventh consecutive year, Louisburg Sports Zone will be handing out an Athlete of the Year honor to a male and female athlete at Louisburg High School. I wanted the opportunity to recognize those who exemplify what it means to be an "athlete."

Although I am giving out the award, I wanted the process to be subjective, so I asked the head coaches at LHS to help me out. I asked each coach to send me nominations of who they thought exemplified the Athlete of the Year honor. Then they voted for

their top 3 male and female athletes and I tabulated the results and determined the winner. The winner will be announced in the coming days.

Below are the three finalists for the Female Athlete of the Year award in alphabetical order by last name.



IZZY MORELAND – SENIOR – VOLLEYBALL, SOFTBALL

Izzy was a starting member of the Louisburg volleyball team that finished fourth at the Class 4A state tournament. Moreland was a middle blocker for the Wildcats. She finished the season with 105 kills and led the team with 48 blocks.

On the softball diamond, Moreland was the Wildcats' No. 1

pitcher this past season as she helped Louisburg to 11 wins on the year. She was a second team All-Frontier League selection at pitcher.

Moreland led the Wildcats as she threw 94 innings and struck out 90 batters. She also had a 3.92 ERA. At the plate, Moreland finished with a .306 average, 26 hits, two doubles, two triples and a home run. She also added 19 RBIs on the season.



MEGAN QUINN – SENIOR – VOLLEYBALL, SOFTBALL

On the volleyball court, Megan has been the setter for the Wildcats the last two seasons and helped Louisburg to the state tournament the last two years, including a fourth place finish this season. She led the team with 540 assists in a split-setter role and also had a team-high 43 aces.

Quinn also thrived on the softball field as she was an all-league honorable mention selection on the infield and was also one of the Wildcats' starting pitchers. She was the Wildcats' biggest bat in the lineup with four home runs this season and has nine the last two years.

The Louisburg senior batted clean-up for most of the season. She was third on the team with a .342 average to go along with 27 hits and eight doubles to go along with her four home runs and a team-high 38 RBIs.



HAILEY SWORD – SENIOR – VOLLEYBALL, SOCCER

Hailey was a 3-year letter winner for the volleyball team and played all six rotations the past two seasons. Sword tallied a

team-high 308 kills and finished second on the team with 42 aces. Defensively, Sword was also strong in the back row as she was second on the team with 295 digs.

She was selected to the KVA All-State Tournament team after she helped Louisburg to a fourth place finish at state. She also earned honorable mention All-Frontier League honors.

Hailey was also a captain of the Wildcat soccer team this past spring as he helped lead Louisburg to a regional championship. She is a four-year letter winner and she was a part of a school record setting defense that allowed the fewest goals in a season. Sword was also named to the All-Frontier League first team.

Top 10 Louisburg Sports Stories of 2023



It was a successful, and eventful, 2023 for Louisburg High School athletics and for those who are connected to the Wildcat program.

This past year created a lot of school history for LHS and a few programs brought back state hardware.

Below are the top stories from 2023, along with a brief explanation of each. Included in the writeup is the link to

the actual story from the event.

When putting the list together, I took a lot of things into account – whether it was team vs. individual, popularity of the sport, historical achievements and the interest it drew on the web site.

This year was a blast to cover and I am looking forward to seeing what 2024 will bring. Thank you to everyone for their support and can't wait for it all to begin again.



10. Brings Plenty earns first state cross country medal

WAMEGO – Jerynce Brings Plenty had been eyeing this race since the beginning of the season.

After missing out on the opportunity to run at the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships in 2022 due to an injury, Brings Plenty was itching at the chance to run against the state's best.

He got that opportunity at the Wamego Country Club and he took full advantage.

Brings Plenty earned his first state cross country medal as he took 12th overall in a time of 16 minutes and 57 seconds. It has been a long time coming for the Louisburg junior.

"Getting 12th place and a state medal meant everything to me," Brings Plenty said. "All season my main focus was to place as high as I could at state, especially since I had only placed 51st as a freshman and didn't race my sophomore year."

The 2023 season was a successful one for Brings Plenty as he earned a medal in every race he finished. He also moved up the school's all-time leaderboard and currently holds the second fastest time.

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9. Brueggen wins two state swim medals; Brown earns first boys state medal

Sabra Brueggen and Colin Brown put together a pair of historic seasons for their respective swim teams in 2023.

Brueggen doubled her medal count back in May at the state meet at the Capitol Federal Natatorium in Topeka. The Louisburg sophomore earned state medals in both the 100-yard backstroke and 50 freestyle.

After earning the one medal as a freshman a year ago, Brueggen was happy to find the medal stand in both races this season.

However, it has been a long road for Brueggen to get back to the state meet. After suffering a knee injury last summer, she had to work hard to get back in time for this go-round in a recovery that lasted nine months.

“Going into high school swim this season, I only had one personal goal in mind, making it back to finals at state,” Brueggen said. “Little did I know that I was going to make it back to the ‘A’ final in both my events, allowing me to medal. This truly meant the world to me because this past year has been one of the toughest ones yet. Overcoming this nine month long recovery, and accomplishing this at state, was an indescribable feeling.”



As for Brown, the Wildcat freshman earned the school's first state medal in boys swimming back in February at the Shawnee Mission School District Aquatic Center in Lenexa.

Brown recorded a time of 56.46 seconds in the finals of the 100-yard butterfly to take eighth overall. He swam a season-best time of 55.85 in the preliminaries to garner a spot in the finals.

"Colin's swim in the medal finals was so fun to watch," coach Mary Argeropoulos said. "Hardware from state is not easy to earn and he did a marvelous job all season working toward that final."

In all, Louisburg sent four swimmers to the state meet in Brown, Brayton Brueggen, Colton Prettyman and Andrew Jamison and the Wildcats turned in several times that earned spots in the consolation finals. As team, the Wildcats finished 15th overall with 44 points.



8. Cheer takes fourth at state

TOPEKA – Louisburg cheer has been no stranger to the big stage when it comes to the state competition.

The Wildcats have become a mainstay in the Class 4A Game Day Spirit Showcase in the last several years that has included a state championship and a pair of state runner-up finishes.

Louisburg found itself in position for another state plaque in November at the Stormont-Vail Events Center in Topeka. The Wildcats qualified for the finals with an impressive performance, but came up just short of another state plaque as they took fourth overall in Class 4A.

“I am so proud,” Louisburg coach Breanna Kostroske said. “This team had to welcome not one, but two new coaches and has

worked so hard since May on their competition material and it truly showed on the floor Saturday. Being a new coach you are automatically stressed that you haven't given enough to all aspects of a game day routine, but we put our faith in the team and they showed up and truly represented themselves in a huge way."

Members of the Louisburg cheer team are: Elizabeth George, Brooklyn Harmon, Addison Drake, Maddie O'Keefe, Maddy Carpenter-Ross, Caroline Dugger, Anna Brizendine, Reece Jones, Addie Vargo, Laney Stohs, Taryn Osborn, Kayleigh Ramsey, Will Leach, Brooklyn Roney, Harper Boyle, Kimmie Powls, Reece Younggren and Reese Anderson. The Wildcats are coached by Breanna Kostroske and Heather Brummel.



7. Pfannenstiel takes AD position, Wildcat basketball hires new coach Ben Doll

The 2023-24 school year for Louisburg High School activities had little different look to it – especially at the top.

Ty Pfannenstiel was hired as the school's new activities director and took over for Michael Pickman, who will focus on his assistant principal duties and curriculum.

Pfannenstiel, who has been the boys basketball coach for the last six years, resigned his post to take on the activities director position. He also stepped down as an assistant football coach.

“This is very exciting for me,” Pfannenstiel said. “It’s definitely going to be a change. I have been a teacher and a coach for 18 years. I still get to be a teacher half-time, and now I get to step into a new role as an administrator. It is going to be all sports and activities and I am looking forward to the new direction.”

Louisburg then hired Ben Doll to replace Pfannenstiel as the new Wildcat boys basketball coach. Doll has patrolled the sidelines as an assistant for two state championship teams and has coached in numerous state tournaments over his 24 year career.



This is Doll's first head coaching position after spending time as an assistant at St. Thomas Aquinas, Johnson County Community College, Lansing and Blue Valley North.

"I am really excited to get going," Doll said. "It has been a long time coming. I have a lot of great experiences and I am ready to apply those things I have learned into this job. I am ready to put my own stamp on some stuff as well."



6. Wrestling qualifies six for state, Eslinger medals

SALINA – Just like a year ago, Elijah Eslinger found himself one win away from a spot in the state championship match.

Eslinger, who has been ranked in Class 4A at different times throughout the season, has had a long road as a Wildcat heavyweight. One that included a rough freshman year, to progressively getting better.

With a spot in the semifinals at the Class 4A Kansas State Wrestling Championships already wrapped up, he had already secured his second state medal in Salina. Although he didn't make that championship match, Eslinger still left Salina with some hardware.

“To make the semifinals was exciting, especially since it was

the closest match I had,” Eslinger said. “It was probably close to the hardest match that I had over the weekend. I feel like I could have done better looking at my matches in hindsight.”

The Wildcats nearly had two more wrestlers earn spots on the medal stand. Junior J’Lee Collins (126 pounds) and sophomore Ashton Moore (175) both made their way to the blood round and needed a win to secure a state medal.

The Wildcats also experienced some heartbreak as senior Kaven Bartlett fell short of his goal of earning another state medal. At 138 pounds, Bartlett finished the state tournament with a 1-2 record.

Senior Trace Eslinger (215) and sophomore Jay McCaskill (157) also represented the Wildcats at the state tournament, but finished with an 0-2 record.



5. Lohse wins three state medals, Lady Cats sixth at state

WICHITA – Emma Lohse blazed the track for the Louisburg girls track and field team all season, and the Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championships was no different.

Lohse picked up three medals and helped the 4×100-meter relay to another school record at Wichita State’s Cessna Stadium. In all, the Lady Cats medaled in five events and finished sixth in the team standings with 29 points.

“Coming back from Wichita with three state medals was something I had to work for and was happy about the outcome,” Lohse said. “Leaving Cessna Stadium one last time, I was very proud of the way I competed and proud of what I came home

with.”

Lohse was just inches away from winning a state championship in the 100-meter dash. At the finish line, the Louisburg senior was step-for-step with Rose Hill’s Kate Dare.

As the two leaned for the finish line, Dare edged Lohse for first as Lohse ran a time of 12.46 seconds. Dare ran a 12.44.

Later in the 200-meter dash, Lohse earned another state medal as she took seventh in 26.77 seconds.



Louisburg's (seated from left) Kendall Crossley, Suzanna Dansel, (standing from left) Mackenzie Rooney and Emma Lohse

pose with their third place state medals in the 4×100 relay. The Lady Cats broke their own school record for the fourth straight time in the prelims.

Sandwiched in between those two races, Lohse helped the 4×100-meter relay of Mackenzie Rooney, Suzanna Dansel and Kendall Crossley to a medal of their own.

The Lady Cat relay finished third overall with a time of 49.70 seconds. Andale won in 49.24 and McPherson was second at 49.67.

However, in the preliminaries on Friday, the team broke their own school record for the fourth consecutive time in 49.26 seconds and had the fastest time going into the finals.

Another Lady Cat to find the medal stand was Emma Prettyman. The Louisburg senior put together a strong showing in the discus.

Prettyman earned her first state medal as she finished sixth in the event with a throw of 115 feet, 9 inches.



4. Wildcat pole vaulters dominate 4A state meet

WICHITA – Maddy Carpenter-Ross, Caden Caplinger and Cooper Wingfield had been considered as some of the top pole vaulters in Class 4A for most of the season.

All three had finished at, or toward the top of each of their meets this year, and all of them had high hopes going into state meet at Wichita State.

Carpenter-Ross and Caplinger reached the highest summit Class 4A had to offer as both were crowned state champions following their respective events.

Caplinger became a two-time state champion first as he cleared 15 feet to win the 4A boys pole vault. Wingfield finished as the state runner-up.

“It means a lot and I am just blessed to have the opportunity to be here and win the title, especially with Cooper right on my tail,” Caplinger said.

Carpenter-Ross thrived under the pressure in the girls competition as she, not only looked for her second consecutive state medal, but her first state championship.

The Louisburg junior captured her first state title after she cleared 11 feet, which tied a personal best. This coming off a season where she medaled fifth at state a year ago.

“I think it is fantastic,” Carpenter-Ross said. “Going to 11 feet, I was tied with the one girl and I was hoping that I would get it on my first try. Then when I did, it was just an amazing feeling.

“It was just awesome for me, plus to see my family’s faces up in the stands was really cool too. Being a state champion is awesome and I plan to do it again.”



3. Wildcat football wins back-to-back Frontier League titles

SPRING HILL – It had been 16 years since the Louisburg football team last repeated as back-to-back Frontier League champions.

That drought ended on an October night in Spring Hill.

In a battle of undefeated league teams, Louisburg proved it was the best. The Wildcats scored 21 unanswered points, and shutout the Broncos in the first half, as they cruised to a 35-21 victory.

Louisburg earned back-to-back league crowns for the first time since the 2006 and 2007 campaigns. The Wildcats also finished the regular season with an 8-0 record.

“It is pretty exciting,” Louisburg coach Drew Harding said. “We talked to the guys before the game about how long it is has been since we have won back-to-back league titles and it has only been done four times in our school’s history. So to chalk another one up there feels pretty good.”

The Wildcats advanced to the regional round of the state playoffs in early November, but lost a heartbreaker to Basehor-Linwood, 22-20, and ended a nine game winning streak.

“This season was a lot of fun,” Harding said. “It is a great group of kids and they worked incredibly hard. They were loose and made it fun every single day. I can’t say enough about how good of kids they are and how hard they work. We hoped to still be moving on, but this loss doesn’t take away from what these kids did all year.”



2. Wildcat volleyball takes fourth at state for second straight year

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, Eryn Richardson, Ashlyn Berck, Katie Elpers, Izzy Moreland, Megan Quinn, Hailey Sword, Madie Williams and head coach Leanna Willer.



1. Wildcat boys track finishes as state runner-up; Dobbins wins state title in high jump as team medals in 13 events

WICHITA – The Louisburg boys track and field team had the resume of a state champion.

The Wildcats racked up 87 points during the Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championships at Wichita State.

Louisburg medaled in all 13 events it competed and the Wildcats finished the meet with two individual state champions. The ending was supposed to feature the Wildcats holding up a state championship plaque.

“If you would have told me at the beginning of the year we

would score 87 points at state and not win a championship, I would have just ignored you and said 'Whatever,'" Louisburg coach Andy Wright said. "No way that would happen."

As it turned out, the Wildcats found themselves on the outside looking in for a team state title. Andale finished first with 87.5 points. Louisburg had 87.

It was an emotional letdown for the Wildcats as they were so close to that team goal.

"To beat Andale, we had to score 88 and that is just a testament to how good they are," Wright said. "They have really good athletes, especially in the throws. At the same time, I couldn't be more proud of my guys and how they competed. It was just so much fun to watch them lay it all out there. They really did have a great season."

Mason Dobbins reached new heights at the Class 4A Kansas State Track and Field Championship.

Ok, well maybe not literally.

Dobbins who broke a school record in the high jump earlier this year, didn't reach that height at the state meet – but he didn't need to. The Louisburg senior cleared 6 feet, 6 inches to win the Class 4A high jump title.

It was the first of four state medals that Dobbins would win on the day as he helped lead the Wildcats to the Class 4A state runner-up plaque.



“It meant everything to be a state champion and to be able to medal in all of my events this year since I didn’t last year,” Dobbins said. “Our team trains so hard, and to be able to be runner up by .5 points, is incredible.”

Dobbins nearly earned his second state title in the 110-meter hurdles as he found himself in a battle with Rose Hill’s Teagan Cobb. The two were stride-for-stride going into the final hurdle, but Cobb nipped Dobbins at the finish line.

Later on, he joined Caden Caplinger, Colyer Wingfield and Ethan Ptacek in the 4×100-meter relay and the team medaled third in 43.38 seconds. Ptacek had to run for Ashton Moore, who was injured during the preliminaries.

Then toward the end of the meet, Dobbins, who was sitting seventh in the 200-meter dash after the preliminaries, battled

to keep his team in the state championship race and medaled third in 23.07.

Louisburg senior Nathan Vincent got his team a lot of points in the throwing events as he medaled in the javelin, discus and shot put – with the latter being his best event of the weekend.



Vincent, who just started doing shot put this year, put together his best performance of the season. He recorded a personal best throw of 51-8 in the finals to take third overall. He also went on to take fifth in the discus and sixth in the javelin.

Sophomore Jerynce Brings Plenty also came away with three state medals in the distance events, but none was more precious to him than the 3,200-meter run.

Brings Plenty broke the school record in the event as he medaled third in 9 minutes and 49.41 seconds. He surpassed the old mark of 9:50.60 that was set by Jason Rose in 2007.

He continued his medal streak for the Wildcats as he joined Hunter Heinrich, Blaise Vohs and Colton Blue to medal seventh in the 4×800-meter relay.

Later in the day, Brings Plenty competed in the 1,600 run and took sixth in 4:34.42.

Louisburg senior Nathan Apple left his final state meet with a pair of medals in both hurdle events. Apple finished fourth in the 110-meter hurdles in 15.29 seconds on Saturday.

Apple also went on to take fourth in the 300 hurdles in 40.55 seconds as he ended his Wildcat track career on a positive note.

The Wildcats ended the state meet with the 4×400-meter relay as the team of Heinrich, Vohs, Colyer Wingfield and Ptacek needed a third place finish or better to win the state title. Unfortunately, the Wildcats came up just short as they took fourth in 3:23.98.

Louisburg set a new personal record by three seconds and was .25 seconds away from tying the school record. The Wildcats also scored points in all three relay events.

**Sword follows in family's
footsteps to Graceland**

volleyball



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword recently signed her letter of intent to play volleyball at Graceland University next season.

Hailey Sword is no stranger to Graceland University.

It is a school she has known about ever since she was young. Her father, Todd, played volleyball at Graceland.

So naturally, Hailey grew up around the sport and it became a big part of her life. As it turns out, she will be following in her father's footsteps.

Hailey signed her letter of intent to play volleyball at Graceland University next season after a successful career with the Louisburg program.

"I chose Graceland because I really like the school and campus," Hailey said. "They have what I want to study, and my dad went there, so it feels good to be carrying on the Sword family name at Graceland. I also had the opportunity to play either of my sports."

As easy as the decision was to attend Graceland, the choice of sports was the more difficult one. Hailey, who has also experienced a lot of success on the soccer pitch, also had the

opportunity to play that on the college level.

In the end, volleyball won out and she is looking forward to joining the Graceland program.

“I was thinking about playing soccer, but soccer and volleyball are the same season so I had to choose one,” Hailey said. “It was a very difficult decision, but in the end I chose volleyball because I can see myself enjoying it more.”

Sword played a big part on the last two Wildcat volleyball teams that have ended their seasons at the state tournament. She helped the Wildcats to a fourth-place state finish each of the last two seasons.



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword signed her letter of intent to join the Graceland University volleyball program. Seated next to Hailey are her parents Chris and Todd Sword. Standing (from left) is Graceland coach Stew McDole, Hailey's brother Matthew and Louisburg coach Leanna Willer.

This past year, Sword was named to the Class 4A state All-Tournament Team. She was also selected to the All-Frontier League honorable mention team.

Sword played all six rotations for Louisburg, and was big for the Wildcats at the net. Sword tallied a team-high 308 kills and finished with 42 aces.

Defensively, Sword was also strong in the back row as she was second on the team with 295 digs.

It is that success that helped her find a home at Graceland as Hailey officially achieved a dream she's had since she was little.

"I have always wanted to play college volleyball, ever since I was a kid," Hailey said. "It means a lot to me to be able to continue playing. It makes me feel like the person that a younger version of me would be looking up to.

"I am so excited to join the Graceland program because it is a very knowledgeable program and I know it will be a great experience. I know that I will continue to learn and get better."

Although Sword played all six rotations in high school, she is unsure of where she will play in college. None of that really matters to her, however. She is just looking forward to the experience.

"As of right now, I have no idea where I fit in the program, but I am excited to find out," she said. "My goals are to just enjoy it, and not put too much pressure on myself. I also want to hold myself to being flexible and putting the team first."