

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.

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 the 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.

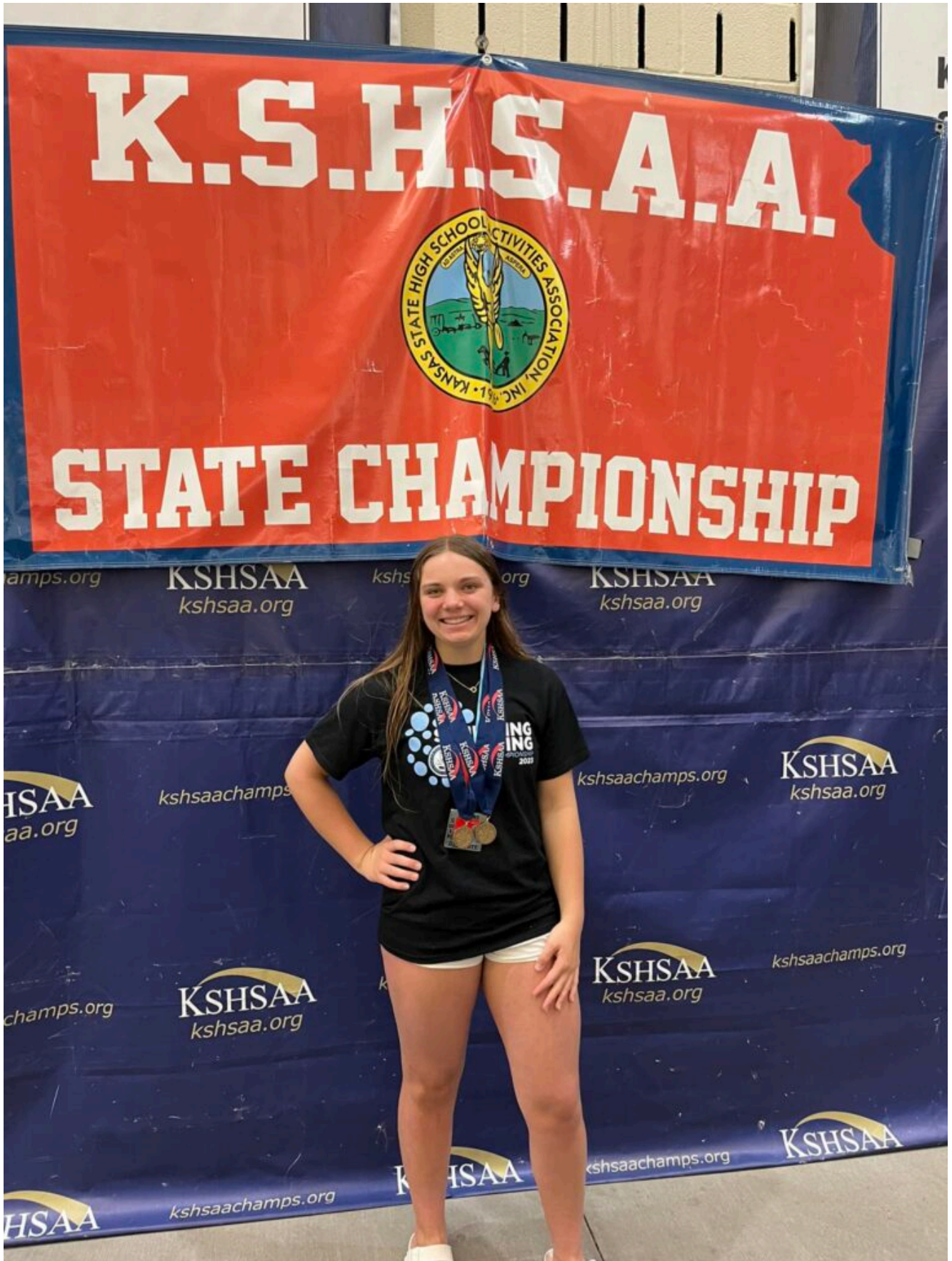
After missing out on the opportunity to run at the Class 4A Kansas State Cross Country Championships in 2022 due to an injury, Brings Plenty was itching at the chance to run against the state's best.

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.



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, Evyn 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."

Williams, Sword earn all-league volleyball honors



With the 2023 volleyball season in the rear view mirror, postseason honors are starting to come out and a pair of Louisburg athletes were honored.

The All-Frontier League team was recently released and two Wildcats made the list after helping Louisburg to a fourth place finish at state for the second consecutive season.

Senior Madie Williams earned second team honors, while senior Hailey Sword was named to the honorable mention squad.

“Our league is extremely competitive in most sports, and volleyball is no exception,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “We have a ton of girls that are high level athletes and planning to play at the next level from almost every school in our league. The structure and voting process of our all-league teams is sometimes difficult to understand, but it should be considered a very big honor to be selected to our All-Frontier League teams. I would have liked to see a couple more of our girls recognized, but we are proud to have Madie and Hailey representing us.”

Williams, who played in all six rotations for Louisburg, made big impact for the Wildcats all over the floor. On the defensive end, Williams led the team with 305 digs on the season.

Offensively, Williams was second on the team with 287 kills despite missing a few games this season with an injury. She was also strong from behind the service line with a team-high 43 aces.

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

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

"Madie and Hailey both had great senior seasons," Willer said. "They were asked to do a lot for our team as they never came off the floor if they were healthy. They had to be our go-to hitters for a kill, be smart, yet aggressive on out-of-system plays, play great defense both front and back row, and serve receive every rotation. We relied on them for all aspects of the game.

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ALL-FRONTIER LEAGUE VOLLEYBALL

FIRST TEAM

Fisayo Afonja, Baldwin, senior

Rayah Foltz, Eudora, senior

Emery Keebaugh, Ottawa, senior

Shannon Drakes, Spring Hill, senior

Keilah Rivers, Spring Hill, senior

LIBERO: Taryn Marcum, Paola, senior

SETTER: Ellie Suber, Eudora, senior

SECOND TEAM

Alyssa Reichard, Baldwin, senior

Madie Williams, Louisburg, senior

Anna Kane, Paola, senior

Sydney Buscher, Spring Hill, junior

Mikinzi Smoots, Tonganoxie, senior

LIBERO: Parker Long, Eudora, senior

SETTER: Kasia Baldock, Tonganoxie, senior

HONORABLE MENTION

Mackenzie Campbell, Bonner Springs, senior

Adalyn Hemphill, Eudora, junior

Hailey Sword, Louisburg, senior

Dylan Nichols, Ottawa, sophomore

Brylynn Wicker, Paola, junior

Finley Rieke, Tonganoxie, sophomore

Lucy Rieke, Tonganoxie, senior

LIBERO: Claire Baker, Baldwin, junior; Gracie Klecan, Spring Hill, senior; Bailey Poje, Tonganoxie, senior

SETTER: Avery Bergan, Baldwin, senior

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 Miego, 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.

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."

BACK-TO-BACK: Wildcats win second straight sub-state title



Senior Ashlyn Berck hoists the Class 4A sub-state championship plaque Saturday following Louisburg's 2-0 win over Independence at Independence High School.

INDEPENDENCE – Louisburg has a prolific history when it comes to making the state volleyball tournament.

The Wildcats added that resume Saturday in Independence.

Louisburg, the No. 7 seed, rolled through No. 2 Independence in the sub-state championship match, 25-17 and 25-20, to earn

its second straight sub-state title. The Wildcats defeated No. 10 Paola, 25-22 and 25-18, in semifinals

“It meant so much to win sub-state, especially with this team,” Louisburg senior Megan Quinn said. “I have so much love for this team and I was not ready to say goodbye to the girls yet. I felt that our team played really good all around on Saturday and that we connected the best we have all season.”

The Wildcats are no stranger to one of volleyball’s biggest stages as this will be the 20th time in school history that they have qualified for the state tournament.



Members of the Louisburg sub-state championship team are (front row, from left) Madie Williams, Izzy Moreland, Ashlyn Berck, Megan Quinn, Hailey Sword, Katie Elpers; (back row) managers Hanna Veres and Kira Kundt, McKenna Lohse, Evyn Richardson, Caileigh Kilgore, Adelyn Moore, Delaney Nelsen, Aspen Coulter and head coach Leanna Willer.

“Winning back-to-back sub-state championships is not an easy feat, and we are so proud of this team for pushing through

different adversities all season long and coming together on Saturday to leave it all out on the floor,” Louisburg coach Leanna Willer said. “We are so excited to continue the tradition of excellence in volleyball in Louisburg and to represent our school and community at the state tournament.”

Their quest for a state tournament berth began with Paola in the sub-state semifinals – a team they had beaten twice already this year – and the Wildcats found themselves with their back’s against the wall early.

Paola held an 18-13 advantage in the first set and had all the momentum. A loss for Louisburg would have meant they would have had to win the next two.

Instead, the Wildcats made the plays when they needed them most.

Senior Madie Williams started the run with a kill and an ace, then dug a ball up on a return, setter Adelyn Moore chased it down and then Izzy Moreland reached down and sent the ball over the net with her fist. That led a Paola error and another point.

Moreland followed it up with a block and then Paola sent a hit out of bounds and the match was tied at 18-all. The Panthers responded to take the next two points, but the Wildcats rallied again.



Sophomore Delaney Nelsen dives to dig up a ball Saturday at Independence.

Sophomore McKenna Lohse got a kill from the right side and senior Ashlyn Berck followed with an ace to tie it at 20. Paola responded with a kill to make it 21-20, but Lohse tied it up with a kill over own.

The Wildcats ended the match on a 4-1 run after a tip by senior Hailey Sword, a kill from Williams and a tip from sophomore Caileigh Kilgore. That win put all the pressure on Paola.

“It is really tough to beat a team three times in a row, especially a team like Paola as they have grown over the season,” Williams said. “Overall, I think staying calm and letting our team know that we would be fine as long as we continued to give 100 percent effort throughout the rest of the set really helped give us the winning mindset. We all reminded each other to keep the energy up and just erase those

past mistakes, and that's what really got us to the championship."

Louisburg didn't let up in the second set as the Wildcats jumped out to an 8-3 lead and never looked back. Paola cut the lead to one on a couple different occasions, but the Wildcats were able to hold on.

Williams led the Wildcats from her all-around position as she finished with 11 kills and tied for a team-high eight digs. Sword was second on the team with eight digs, while sophomore Delaney Nelsen and Lohse each added four.



Louisburg senior Megan Quinn sets up a teammate for a kill Saturday at Independence.

Quinn and freshman Adelyn Moore set up their hitters well. Quinn had a team-high 14 assists and Moore finished with 10. Moore also had eight digs.

“Beating any team three times is a challenge, and our rivalry with Paola always results in a high energy, competitive match,” Willer said. “We knew that they would come at us with everything they had, and they sure did. I think our nerves were apparent in that first set as it took us a little while to find our groove, but getting the comeback victory in set 1 was a huge momentum builder for us and it carried over into the second set giving us that extra push to finish the game in two.”

Against Independence in the championship, it was all Louisburg. Sword led the way with a team-high 12 kills. Lohse finished with five and Williams added four of her own.

Defensively, Moreland had a team-high three blocks in the tournament, while Williams had a team-best nine digs.

Moore had a team-high 12 assists and Quinn added eight to go along with six digs.



Louisburg senior Madie Williams goes up for a block.

The Wildcats also thrived from behind the service line with eight aces, including two each from Moore and Nelsen.

“It meant everything to me that we won substate, given me another week to play with my family,” Sword said. “I think the team played pretty well with ups and downs, but this team is definitely playing better every time we get on the court. I am super excited for state.”

It was an all-around team effort for Louisburg on the day and it started up front with Sword and Williams. The impacts continued on down the roster.

“Hailey and Madie both had great games on Saturday as they were our attack leaders and both made big plays in the back row and in serve receive,” Willer said. “They are asked to do a lot for our team as six-rotation players, so their leadership and dependability on the court is very important to the success of our team.

“Megan and Adelyn both ran our offense according to our game plan and did a great job of finding our hitters at the right time in the right place. Ashlyn had a great day on serve receive and McKenna stepped up big-time on the right side for us and had two great games. Delaney served tough all day long, led the team in aces, and did a great job getting the other teams out-of-system. Izzy did a great job being big at the net and leading the team in blocks.”



Louisburg senior Hailey Sword had a team-high 12 kills against Independence on Saturday.

Now, the Wildcats will prepare for the state tournament as they open with pool play Friday at the Hutchinson Sports Arena.

Louisburg earned the No. 6 seed and will square off with No. 3 McPherson first at 3:30 p.m. The Wildcats will then meet Towanda-Circle at 6:30 and No. 7 Holton at 7:30.

The top two teams in each pool will advance to the state semifinals at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

“Friday will bring some big match-ups for us, as the state tournament should,” Willer said. “McPherson is historically a very successful volleyball team and they have a lot of experience at the state tournament. We are looking forward to facing Towanda-Circle again this year. That is a team who just seemed to have our number last year, so our girls are fired up to avenge last year’s team.

“Lastly, Holton will be a great match-up for us. They upset the No. 1 seed in the East in Rock Creek at sub-state, so we are excited to have the opportunity to play them. We are going to need to be playing our best volleyball together as a team to finish in the top 2 in our pool to move on to Saturday’s bracket.”