

Dragons Hold Off Wildcat Charges; Boys' Season Ends

The Mulvane High School boys' basketball team's first-round sub-state game at Belle Plaine Monday night, Feb. 26, was a tale of two halves. There was the low-scoring defensive struggle in the first half, and there was the fast-paced shootout in the second half.

In the end, after getting close several times, the Wildcats came up short as the host Dragons prevailed, 72-63. Mulvane ended its season on a seven-game losing streak, finishing at 6-15. Belle Plaine (16-5), the defending Class 4A state runner-up, advanced to the sub-state semifinals tonight (March 1) against Andover Central at Rose Hill.

"They jumped on us early," said Wildcat coach Scott Dunham. "Their size caused us some problems in the first half. Later, we hit some outside shots, and our press caused several turnovers, which allowed us to get back into the game. Every time we got a run going and got within a few points, we couldn't sustain it, and we'd fall behind again."

Belle Plaine held a 24-15 lead at halftime, but both teams' offenses started to pick up in the third quarter, thanks mainly to Mulvane's press quickening the pace. By the end of the third quarter, Belle Plaine's lead was 46-35. "We were making shots and forcing turnovers, but they also took advantage of when we overplayed on defense," said Dunham. "They were able to get some transition baskets, but we stayed with them, and we had some chances in the fourth quarter."

Despite senior John Knight fouling out with six minutes remaining, Mulvane got within two points midway through the fourth quarter, but never got the ball with a chance to tie. "We just couldn't get over the hump," said Dunham. "Every time we got close, they would go on a run of their own and get the lead back around nine or 10 points."

Dylan Donaldson led the Wildcats with 12 points. Knight scored 11, and Andrew Myers added 10. Mulvane also got eight points each from Tyler Springer and Ryan Herrig, six from Jordan Gosch, and four each from Brenton Higgins and Quinton Smith.

Rose Hill Class 4A Sub-State Pairings

THURSDAY, MARCH 1
 6 p.m.—Andover Central boys (17-4) vs. Belle Plaine boys (16-5)
 7:30 — Rose Hill boys (19-2) vs. Wellington boys (15-6)

FRIDAY, MARCH 2
 6 p.m.—Belle Plaine girls (14-7) vs. Clearwater girls (14-7)
 7:30 — Rose Hill girls (11-10) vs. Andover Central girls (19-2)

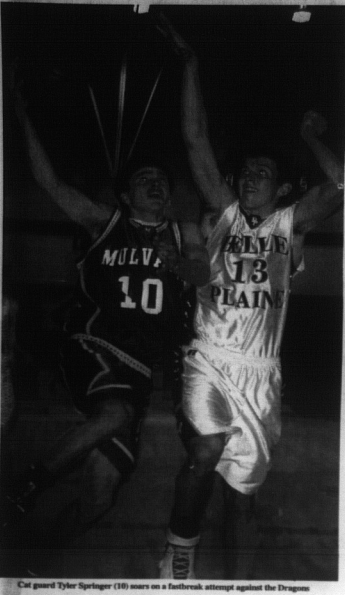
SATURDAY, MARCH 3
 6 p.m.—Girls championship game
 7:30 — Boys championship game

Rose Hill Class 4A Sub-State Tournament FIRST ROUND

Mulvane 7 8 20 28-43
 Belle Plaine 12 13 22 26-23
 Mulvane—Ryan Herrig 8, Andrew Myers 10, Tyler Donaldson 12, Jordan Gosch 4, Quinton Smith 4, Tyler Springer 8, John Knight 11, Brenton Higgins 4. PG 21 (6), FT 13-19, F 20.
 Belle Plaine—Cooper Stewart 24, Kevin Jerick 2, Steve Montgomery 20, Nathan Bunk 10, Austin Hunt 4, Bryan Gosch 10. FG 25 (2), FT 20-23, F 17.

Andover Central 72, Clearwater 47
 Rose Hill 48, Douglas 45
 Wellington 28, Independence 44

Varsity Boys
 Buhler 14 17 11 15-37
 Mulvane 13 23 10 8-34
 Buhler—Jeremy Allen 4, Cody Beaton 20, Reed Pankratz 2, Parker Ray 5, Reedl Mack 9, Michael Curwin 3, Sean Wodt 9, Eli Reed 1, Mikal Augustine 2. FG 14 (3), FT 18-24.
 Mulvane—Brenton Higgins 7, Tyler Springer 6, Ryan Herrig 6, Andrew Myers 6, John Knight 14, Dylan Donaldson 6, Jordan Gosch 9. PG 21 (6), FT 6-6.



Cat guard Tyler Springer (10) soars on a foulhook attempt against the Dragons.

The Wildcats had a chance to go into the sub-state on a winning note, but they let one get away on Senior Parents' Night Thursday night, Feb. 22, against Buhler.

The visiting Crusaders scored the game's final eight points to steal victory away from the Wildcats, 57-54. Buhler finished 3-7 and in fourth place in AVCTL Division III, and Mulvane finished fifth in the league at 2-8.

The first quarter saw both teams play evenly, with Buhler holding a 14-13 lead at the end of the period. The Wildcats put on a run late in the first half to grab a five-point halftime lead, 36-31. Buhler scored the first six points of the second half to briefly take the lead, but Mulvane fought back, thanks to key baskets by Knight, Springer, and Higgins, to take a 46-42 lead by the end of the quarter.

In the fourth quarter, two free throws by Knight put the Wildcats up, 54-49. The Crusaders chipped the lead down to one, then got the ball back with under a minute to play. Buhler's Cody Beaton scored a layup off a backdoor cut to give the Crusaders a 55-54 lead with just over 30 seconds remaining. A baseline jumper by Knight missed short, and Buhler got the rebound, forcing Mulvane to foul with 10 seconds left. Two free throws made it a three-point game, and Herrig's final three-point attempt bounced off the rim as the final buzzer sounded.

Free throws were one of the most key statistics of the game. Buhler went 18-for-24 from the line while Mulvane was 6-for-8. Knight finished with 14 points to lead the Wildcats. Gosch had nine points on three three-pointers, and Higgins added seven. Mulvane also got six points each from Springer, Herrig, Myers, and Donaldson. Knight, Herrig, and Myers were the three Wildcat seniors recognized during the Senior Night ceremony.

Despite the season-ending slump, there is reason for optimism. The six wins doubled last season's total (3-18), and despite graduating three senior starters, there are several players with experience expected back next year, including Juniors Donaldson and Smith and sophomores Gosch, Higgins, and Springer. Also, this year's junior varsity squad had a very successful season.

"We lost five games by a total of 11 points, including one overtime game," said Dunham. "We could've just as easily finished with nine or 10 wins. We played very tough against quality opponents, and our seniors worked hard and showed great leadership. Our biggest problem was finishing games, and that's something we'll need to work on going into next season."