

Cat Boys Keep Improving; Win No. 1

After a free-fall the first nine games of the season, the Mulvane High School boys were in a soaring mood Friday afternoon during the 29th annual Roadrunner Classic at Chaparral.

All the hard work finally paid off. All the sweat. All the tears. All the effort.

The Wildcats and new coach John Darrow stepped up to the plate and hit a Mark McGuire job against Conway Springs as they spanked the Cardinals, 50-46, in a semifinal game of the tournament for their first victory of the year.

The Cats followed that Saturday, Jan. 22, with another good effort but ran out of gas on the way to a 73-52 loss to Campus in the game for fifth place. Mulvane opened the tournament seeded 8th in the eight-team field and lost in the opening game to No. 1 seeded Kingman, 58-40, Wednesday, Jan. 19. Kingman went on to take the tourney championship, 59-57, over Arkansas City.

"The tournament was real good for us actually," said Darrow. "We had some kids step up and do some nice things for us. Overall, I was really pleased. For one thing, getting your first victory was a big one. It gets the monkey off your back. And we played a strong game in all three games."

Campus may have dished out a 21-point loss to take 5th place, but the Cats were right in there slugging until the final six minutes of the game. "Campus had us down by 25 and we made a run at them in the third quarter and cut the lead to eight points with about six minutes left in the 4th quarter," said Darrow. "And we had the ball, but we kind of just ran out of gas right then. They hit three three-pointers right after that and it broke our back. That was the end of it."

Early against the Colts, it was one-sided. Campus rolled out to a 15-6 lead after one quarter and appeared on its way to an easy one until Mulvane came alive in the 4th quarter.

"We didn't play good basketball early in the game but later, we started doing the things that got us back in the ball game," said Darrow. "We were executing the offense and giving them only one shot at the basket, and we were getting the rebounds. When you do that, you have to make the shots at the other end, and we were doing that, but we had to put so much effort into the push back into the game that we just ran out of gas. Campus just kept throwing athletes at us."

Darrow said poor shot selection and turnovers hurt the Wildcats early in the game. "We really regressed from the point we had reached through improvement in about every game," said the Wildcat coach. "We had been improving for about four or five straight games but we lost it in that first half. The kids came back with some adjustments after halftime and we started getting people where they should have been on offense. That enabled us to cut down on our turnovers, took the pressure off our guards and we started playing better."

And it didn't hurt to have senior Jesse Marksberry get hot, hitting six in a row. Guard Jason Wilson also hit a couple of big shots and the offense started to spark rather than sputter. And senior Jared Rice and Troy Johnson, a sophomore, started clearing the catoms, which kind of got Mulvane going on the defensive end.

"After getting our first victory the night before, the kids were really, really pumped up and I think they just had a letdown early against Campus," noted Darrow. "But these kids never gave up. They kept fighting back into the ball game. That's the kind of attitude that's going to turn this program around."

Marksberry finished with his second-best game this season, scoring 14 points. Wilson scored 10 points, Nick Pope had eight and Chris Brannon and Rice scored six points each.

It seemed only a matter of time before the Cats cracked the victory barrier after playing improved ball the last two weeks. Enter: Conway Springs.

MHS rallied from a nine-point deficit in the first few minutes to push their way past Conway Springs, the tournament's 1999 champion.

Conway scored the first seven points of the game and held a nine-point lead in the opening period but Mulvane scratched its way back to the top. "We were up by six points and missed some free throws down the stretch that could have iced the victory," pointed out Darrow, "but the kids held on to grab it."

The Cardinals were down three, 48-45, and had the ball and a time out with about seven seconds left. Darrow decided to foul the Cardinals so they couldn't get a three-pointer off that might tie it up and the strategy worked. The Cardinals hit one shot, then missed the second intentionally. Rice blocked out on the rebound and was fouled. He made both shots at the other end to conclude the scoring.

"I was more excited for the kids than anybody," said Darrow about his first career victory at the MHS helm. "They had

worked so hard. I just knew it was a matter of time before we'd get one. The biggest factor is that we did an excellent job of executing our offense. We ended up with only nine turnovers (a season low) and that made all the difference in the world.

"In that second half, I thought our guys were patient on offense and on defense, we covered their shooters and that frustrated them. It was our best defensive effort of the season." That led to a season-low 56 points scored for the opposition.

Darrow singled out the sophomore Johnson for having a super ball game. He scored a team-high 12 points and also was a force on the boards. Marksberry finished with nine points, Brannon scored seven, Rice had six and freshman Caleb Alexander scored five off the bench.

Mulvane started the tournament by pushing the Eagles from Kingman to the limit before an untimely foul call gave Kingman the momentum it needed. The Wildcats trailed by only four points with five minutes left in the game. The Eagles beat Mulvane to a loose ball and fired off a three-pointer, which hit the target. On the play, Mulvane was called for a foul on the rebound attempt and Kingman got the ball back and hit another three-pointer. Suddenly, the Wildcats were down 10 and Kingman had all the momentum in the world.

"That was the turning point of that game," said Darrow. "It wasn't an 18-point game. We played a great game which gave our kids a lot of confidence. What kept us in the ball game is our zone defense. We covered their shooters and packed it in on their big guy inside. We also limited them to only nine offensive rebounds the whole game. We hit the boards extremely well. Jared Rice had 10 rebounds, which was the first time we had anybody in double figures in rebounding this year. And Troy Johnson also did a swell job on the boards."

In the scoring department, Marksberry had his season-best, an 18-point night.

29th Annual Chaparral Roadrunner Boys Classic FIFTH PLACE

Campus	15	13	22	23—73
Mulvane	6	10	15	21—52

Campus—Dustin Haywood 14, Dustin Musgrove 8, Jeremy Brown 4, Justin Franz 5, Britt Clubb 17, Kody Miller 7, Brandon Minnick 11, Durk Reinhard 2, Tony Gant 5. FG 24 (6), FT 19-29, F 20.

Mulvane—Jesse Marksberry 14, Nick Pope 8, Chris Brannon 6, Jared Rice 6, Jason Wilson 10, Ryan McKnight 2, Troy Johnson 4, Chris Gerhardt 2. FG 17 (2), FT 16-21, F 26.

FIRST PLACE

Kingman 59, Arkansas City 57

THIRD PLACE

Chaparral 62, Medicine Lodge 55

SEVENTH PLACE

Clearwater 64, Conway Springs 55

SEMIFINAL ROUND

Mulvane	8	11	17	14—50
Conway Springs	13	9	8	16—46

Mulvane—Troy Johnson 12, Jared Rice 6, Caleb Alexander 5, Chris Brannon 7, Jason Wilson 2, Jesse Marksberry 9, Ryan McKnight 4, Chris Gerhardt 3. FG 12 (1), FT 25-35, F 17.

Conway Springs—Paul Speer 16, Bret Hartman 5, Paul Lange 5, Nolan Pauly 2, David McMillan 9, Billy Lann 7. FG 17 (2), FT 10-16, F 25.

Campus 82, Clearwater 60
Kingman 62, Chaparral 44
Arkansas City 67, Medicine Lodge 62

FIRST ROUND

Kingman	13	10	13	22—58
Mulvane	10	8	12	10—40

Kingman—Pat Miller 14, Cody Young 4, Cooper Geist 14, Cactus Dodge 6, Jordan White 16, Justin Taber 4. FG 22 (7), FT 7-9, F 13.

Mulvane—Jesse Marksberry 18, Jared Rice 8, Chris Gerhardt 2, Troy Johnson 10, Ryan McKnight 2. FG 18 (0), FT 4-6, F 15.

Chaparral 54, Conway Springs 46
Medicine Lodge 78, Clearwater 36
Arkansas City 74, Campus 60

Johnson scored 10 points and Rice finished with eight.

Marksberry, a senior, was named to the Roadrunner Classic All-Tournament Team announced at the conclusion of the tournament. Marksberry had his best cluster of games, scoring 41 points in the three-game run.

The Cats will get a chance to rest until Friday night, Jan. 28, when they are at Andale in a league game.



Guard Jason Wilson (21) splits the defense on the way to a bucket