

# State Visit Habit-Forming For Mason's Wildcats

It's like a good habit, you never can get enough of the state tournament.

Just like an alcoholic. Just one sip and you slip back into the old rut. Mulvane High School's boy basketballers have become "state-aholics." Just one taste of sweetness four years ago and there's only one place to end the basketball season--Salina.

Salina is the site of the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) Class 4A State Tournament and Mulvane is headed back for familiar habits.

The Wildcats, coached by Charlie Mason, punched their tickets to Salina Saturday night, March 7, when they pushed their way past Clearwater, 62-54, in the championship game of the Augusta 4A Sub-State. It marked the third time in the last four years Mulvane has qualified for the 4A extravaganza at the Bicentennial Center in Salina and the second year in a row for this group of seniors, all starters one year ago when Mulvane made a one-game appearance, losing to Goodland, 68-63.

At Salina, Mulvane drew the No. 5 seed with their 18-5 record and will tangle with Haven (21-2), the No. 4 seed, in the second game today. That game is slated to start at 4:45 p.m. this afternoon at the Salina Bicentennial Center.

Other first-round pairings in the 4A shoot-out find No. 1 seeded Colby (21-2) meeting Topeka Hayden (15-8) at 3, No. 2 seeded Abilene (21-2) against DeSoto (17-6) at 6:30 and Atchison (21-2), seeded third, against Baxter Springs (15-7) at 8:15.

"It's a great feeling," said Mason after the sub-state victory. "These kids deserve it, too. Not too many people gave them a chance to be there, but once you get there (to the state), there's no better feeling. It's really special when you win it the first time but still you always want to go back again and again."

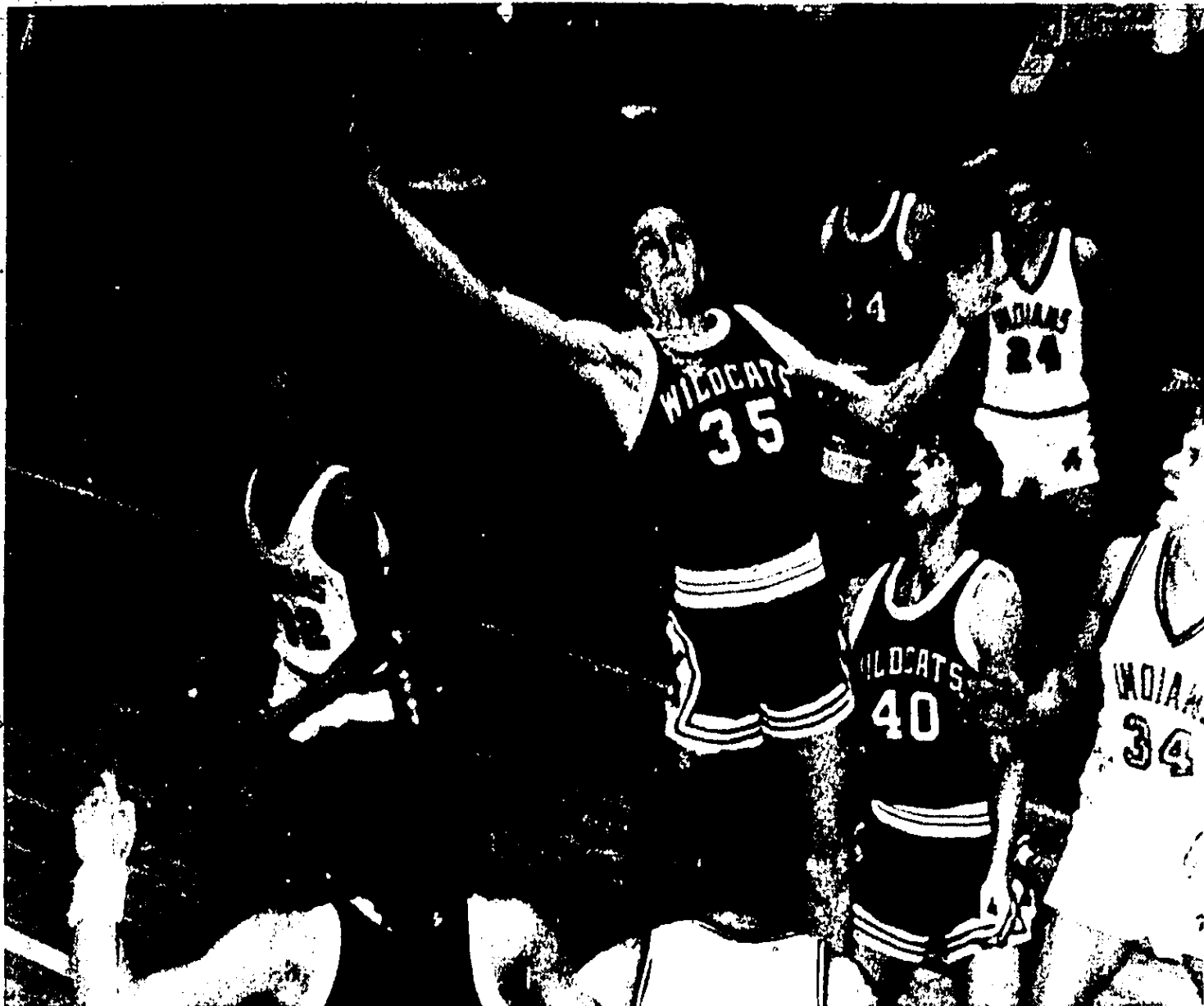
To get to Salina a second successive year, the Wildcats, who bumped their record to 18-5, had to handle Clearwater, a team which had given the Cats a struggle just two weeks ago before Mulvane prevailed, 66-62.

In the semifinals, the two teams set up a rematch when Clearwater thumped No. 1 sub-state seed Circle, 69-60, and the Cats edged Maize, 66-65.

"We talked before the game about getting them to the fourth quarter because I knew they had a very hard, emotional ball game the night before," said Mason. "We wanted to be close and wanted to keep the pressure on them and wear them down, I think that's what happened."

Mulvane was cooking early, jumping out to an 8-0 lead before Clearwater came alive to take a 17-16 lead after one. And when Mulvane went chilly from the field, the Indians, whose season ended at 13-10, marched out to their biggest lead, 25-20, before the Cats reeled off a 7-2 spree ending with Curtis Hicks' two free throws just before intermission to tie things at 27-27.

Clearwater quickly took a four-point lead in the third quarter and held that margin until early in the fourth stanza when Kyle Steadman scored twice and Todd Fox once to tie things at 43-43. It was all Mulvane after that as Fox drove the baseline for back-to-back buckets and Andrew Swayne, Steadman and Hicks hit eight free throws in a row. That put the Cats comfortably ahead, 58-48, because Clearwater missed the front end of one-and-ones three times during the run. And even though the Cats missed four straight front ends in the final 1:04, Clearwater couldn't close the gap to only 58-54 before Fox sealed the sub-state crown with four free



Todd Fox [35] skies for a rebound as Cats Morgan LeClair, Andrew Swayne [40] and Kyle Steadman [34] moved to basket

**MULVANE**

# Sports

**BOYS CLASS 4A STATE BASKETBALL PAIRINGS AT BICENTENNIAL CENTER-SALINA Today [March 12]**

Game 1 -- Colby (21-1) vs. Topeka Hayden (15-8), 3 p.m.  
 Game 2 -- Haven (21-2) vs. Mulvane (18-5), 4:45  
 Game 3 -- Abilene (21-2) vs. DeSoto (17-6), 6:30  
 Game 4 -- Atchison (21-2) vs. Baxter Springs (15-7), 8:15

**Friday, March 13**

Game 5 -- winners of games 1 and 2, 4:45 p.m.  
 Game 6 -- winners of games 3 and 4, 8:15

**Saturday, March 13**

Game 7 (Third Place)--losers of games 5 and 6, 2:45 p.m.  
 Game 8 (Championship)--winners of games 5 and 6, 8:15

tosses.

"I think we played a near perfect ball game," admitted Mason, who has guided his team into the sub-state championship game four years in a row. "We executed the things we wanted to execute. We hit the free throws and we shut their big man off."

The job Mulvane did on Clearwater's 6-foot, 5-inch Chris Hickman was outstanding. He scored 17 points but only one in the final quarter when the game was on the line. "We wanted to sit back in a 2-3 zone and put Steadman in front and Swayne behind him. We felt like the other kids, for the most part, weren't scoring threats. We just did a great job defensively on him."

Mason also wanted to keep the Mulvane pressing defense buzzing and the offense clicking. "We executed our offense," said Mason. "We shot the ball well. Andrew Swayne had a tremendous tournament. He had 18 points and 14 rebounds against Maize then came back with a super job on Hickman."

A Wildcats' trademark--balanced scoring--was in evidence both nights at

Augusta. Five players scored in double figures in the championship game with Fox gunning in 19 points and Hicks scoring 14. Swayne finished 12 points and Steadman scored 11.

It was an uphill pull most of the way for the Mulvane boys two nights earlier in a 66-65 semifinal triumph over Maize. The Eagles scored in the opening moments to take a quick 8-0 lead before Mulvane finally marked.

And the Wildcats had to work hard to get back in the game by intermission. In fact, Mulvane pulled ahead in the second quarter using the trapping pressure defense to shake up the Eagles. Another factor was that Maize, which tied with Circle and Kingman for the Chisholm Trail League Division II championship, got into foul trouble. Mulvane ended up making 20 of 31 free shots.

"We played a pretty decent game except for the first quarter and the last two minutes," said Mason. "Our defense really played well, even when our offense was struggling."

It was that sticky trapping defense which forced numerous turnovers and

**AUGUSTA 4A SUB-STATE Boys Championship**

Clearwater Boys	17	10	14	13-54
Mulvane Boys	16	11	10	25-62
Clearwater--Jason Jones 2, Jamie Newlin 15, Brian Whillow 8, Chris Hickman 17, John Foley 2, Dan Biby 10. FG 23-51, FT 8-11, F 21.				
Mulvane--Kyle Steadman 11, Curtis Hicks 14, Morgan LeClair 6, Todd Fox 19, Andrew Swayne 12. FG 23-46, FT 16-23, F 14				
<b>Semifinal Boys</b>				
Maize Boys	21	13	16	15-65
Mulvane Boys	13	21	17	13-66
Maize--Bill Baker 12, Paul Baxter 12, Kelly Cotton 14, Kirk Bliss 6, Randy Ball 1, John Bezdek 14. FG 27-46, FT 11-16, F 23				
Mulvane--Kyle Steadman 7, Curtis Hicks 9, Morgan LeClair 20, Todd Fox 10, Andrew Swayne 8, Jeff Williams 2. FG 23-50, FT 20-31, F 17.				

enabled Mulvane to scratch its way into the lead, a lead that at times soared to five points.

In the final 30 seconds, Mulvane held a 66-62 lead with the ball but nearly blew it. Andrew Swayne hit a bucket and two free throws and Kyle Steadman made one of two from the stripe to give Mulvane a 64-56 lead with 2:25 left but Maize didn't quit, closing it to 66-62. Maize's Paul Baxter swiped the ball from Mulvane's Jeff Williams as the Cats tried to run the block. Baxter made the layup and was fouled by Williams, the three-point play giving Maize a chance to win it in the last two seconds with a fielder. However, the shot missed and Swayne cleared the rebound as the game ended.

The victory enabled Mason's Wildcats to make the championship game of the sub-state for the fourth year in a row. Last year and three years ago, the Cats won to go to the 4A state tournament. LeClair and Swayne kept the Cats in the game offensively, scoring 20 and 18 points, respectively. Todd Fox was a third Wildcat in double figures, scoring 10 points.

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