

Late Turnover Gives Cats Their First Loss

The bug turned out to be "the pits." A strange thing happened on Mulvane High School's march to the Maize Boys Tournament championship Saturday night, Dec. 20.

A sickly Wildcat team held on until the final seconds before Pratt pulled out a 57-53 upset victory for the championship. The loss was the first for Mulvane this season after reeling off five consecutive victories, including a 64-56 decision over Nickerson Thursday night, Dec. 18, in the second round of the round robin "pool tournament."

The Wildcats, with several players under the weather all week, had battled from behind to take a lead against the Greenbacks at halftime, then lost it in the third quarter and found it in the fourth quarter to tie things at 53-53. Another Pratt turnover gave Coach Charlie Mason's Cats the golden opportunity--the ball in a tie game with 58 seconds left. However, while stalling for the final shot, junior Shay Cornejo's errant pass was picked off and Pratt went in for the winning lay-up. Seconds later, two free throws iced it after the Cats missed on a good inside shot in an attempt to tie.

"Pratt did a good job playing the passing lanes but when you have the ball, playing for the last shot, you hope to get it...but we didn't and that was the ball game," said Mason. "I dislike losing any time but if we can learn from this experience, something positive can come from it."

With starters Todd Fox, Kyle Steadman, Curtis Hicks and reserve Bryson Butts all under the weather during the week, the Wildcats have to feel good about the outcome of the tournament. One of the minus factors leading to the loss was Mulvane's inability to control the backboards. "They hurt us with their size," said Mason. "That's the first time this year that we've been hurt by size. We didn't do a good job handling it. Another factor is that we



only played half the game, basically, we found well in the second quarter and in the last quarter at times."

Pratt jumped out to a 15-5 lead in the first 6:30 of the game as the MHS offense couldn't find the hoop consistently. Fox warmed up, though, hitting a couple quick ones to bring it to 15-9. Fox and Morgan LeClair went in a binge late in the second quarter that carried Mulvane into the locker room with a 29-26 lead.

That torrid pace didn't last and the Greenbacks held Mulvane to only eight points in the third quarter, a season-low. Two free throws by LeClair and a bucket following a turnover by Hicks and one by Cornejo tied the game at 53s.

"All you want in the last minute of the ball game is a chance to win it," added Mason, "and we had that chance but didn't get it."

Fox ended up with a game-high 23 points while the rest of the typical Mulvane balance was slightly lacking. LeClair added 14 points but was the only other Cat in twin figures. Hicks and Cornejo each scored six points.

The Wildcats advanced to the championship game by "stealing" it away from Nickerson Thursday night, Dec. 18. The Cats turned up the heat in the second half and captured a 64-56 verdict.

Mulvane was behind after one half (28-23 at intermission) but quickly took charge in the third quarter behind a vigorous trapping press. Mulvane forced the Panthers into four turnovers in the first minute of the third quarter

and a rebound basket by Todd Fox at the 5:30 mark put Mulvane on top for good, 31-30.

In all, MHS forced 12 Nickerson turnovers in the third stanza to out-score the Panthers, 24-8, before a tip-in as the buzzer allowed Nickerson to reach double figures in the period. "We really put it on 'em," admitted Mason. "Going into the game, we didn't feel like they could handle the press."

He was right. Nickerson's generosity enabled the Wildcats to overcome a horrid night at the free throw line which kept the Cats from blowing the game totally apart. Nickerson's 18 second-half turnovers helped Mulvane prevail even though Mulvane could manage only a 12-for-23 night at the stripe, including a usually-fatal nine missed throws in the final quarter, and five of those were the front end of one-and-ones.

However, Kyle Steadman made a couple of free throws with 46 seconds left to tick after Nickerson came back to only four points down, 60-56, then made two more with 17 seconds left which drive the final nail into the victory.

Balanced scoring again keyed the Mulvane offense. Guard Hicks scored 14 points before fouling out early in the final quarter and tied for team honors with Fox, who also had 14. Both Steadman and LeClair scored 12 points.

"That last quarter was a good learning experience," stressed Mason. "When Curtis fouled out, we continued to be effective on our pressure defense. I think it showed the kids that Curtis isn't the soul of the press, that we can do a good job on it with him on the bench."

Mulvane Puts 3 On All-Tourney Team At Maize

Three Mulvane basketball players were named to the Maize Boys Tournament All-Tournament team. Todd Fox and Curtis Hicks were named to the first team and Morgan LeClair was named to the second team. All three are seniors.

Mulvane finished the tourney last Saturday, Dec. 20, with a loss in the championship game to Pratt, 57-53, to finish second in the tournament.

Brennen Wood of Pratt was the tourney's M.V.P. Others on the first team were Paul Baxter of Maize and Shannon Farr of Nickerson. Players on the second team were Eric Burns of Valley Center, Todd Courbot of Pratt, Todd Osborne of Nickerson and James Lies of Andale.

MAIZE BOYS TOURNAMENT Championship

Mulvane 9 20 8 18-53
Pratt 15 11 13 18-57
Mulvane--Curtis Hicks 8, Kyle Steadman 2, Andrew Swayne 2, Morgan LeClair 14, Todd Fox 23, Shay Cornejo 6. FG 25-55, FT 3-7, F 20.
Pratt--Rod Martin 5, Todd Courbot 12, Brennen Wood 21, Mike Adelhardt 8, Matt Havlas 9, Brian Mills 2. FG 23-50, FT 11-21, F 9.

Third Place

Nickerson 52, Maize 51

Fifth Place

Andale 66, Valley Center 62

Semifinals

Mulvane 12 11 24 17-64
Nickerson 12 16 10 18-58
Mulvane--Curtis Hicks 14, Kyle Steadman 12, Andrew Swayne 7, Morgan LeClair 12, Todd Fox 14, Shay Cornejo 4, Jeff Williams 1. FG 26-60, FT 12-23, F 17.
Nickerson--Shannon Farr 12, Todd Osborne 14, Teddy Webster 10, Mike Tippie 11, Jeff Briggs 4, Jim Walker 2, Tom Schweizer 3. FG 23-55, FT 10-15, F 24.

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Pratt 69, Valley Center 60

Nickerson 63, Andale 60

First Round

Mulvane 80, Andale 72

Pratt 67, Maize 55

Maize 72, Valley Center 68