

Regional Loss

'Hot' Wellington Gives Cats Bad Case Of Heart Burn

Nobody wants to play "the hot team" and Wellington on fire heading into the Mulvane Class 4A Regional Softball Tournament at the Mulvane sports complex.

Mulvane's softball season game to a close in the first game of the regional as Wellington burned the Cat homestead to the ground with a 13-10 victory. The semifinal was but a stepping stone for the Crusaders as they later toppled the defending champion Rose Hill Rockets, 4-1, to advance to the State Championship Friday and Saturday, May 26-27, in Manhattan at Cico Park.

"We had hoped to do as well as we could but the luck of the draw gave us the hottest team going," noted MHS softball coach Charlie Mason. "We had split with Wellington earlier in the year and that made them 5-5, and they're going to the state tournament with a 14-6 record, so they were 9-1 down the stretch. That also includes beating Maize, which was undefeated at that time."

Call it bad luck, "but they're going and we're not," said Mason. "It was a pretty good ball game, though. Whoever batted last was going to win and unfortunately, they batted last. We came back and they came back. It was just one of those games where we needed to score runs in every inning and we didn't get it done."

The game started to unravel for the Wildcats, who ended their season at 11-10, the first winning season in school history, in the sixth inning. Mulvane had rallied to take the lead in the fifth with five runs. Wellington answered with four, taking a 12-9 lead. But the Cats, with the top of the order up, came up with nothing but air in the sixth.

"That was the critical inning because we didn't score," stressed Mason. "In a big game, you have to come up to the challenge. In this game, we needed to score runs in every inning and we didn't get it done."

Wellington did. "Wellington had a lot of people come through at the right time," said Mason. "They pitched one pitcher all year long and she was steady but we got 15 hits off her earlier this year and we got 10 in the



Mulvane's Shannon Reed makes contact at the plate against Wellington

semifinal game. They were sticking the ball all year and unfortunately for us, some of their hits were falling in Wednesday."

Mulvane's 10 hits were offset by Wellington's 11. Timely hitting was something that Wellington was strong on and the Wildcats came up a bit short. The host Wildcats left the bases loaded in the seventh inning, scoring only once as the game ended.

The big stick for MHS was Laura Butler, who went 3-for-4 with two RBIs and NiChelle Bruce, who went 2-for-4 with two runs scored. Shannon Reed also scored twice.

"Another factor is that you have to have a bit of luck, and they had that, too," said Mason. "They made some plays that nor-

mally wouldn't have been made and that helps out during the course of a game."

Mulvane righthander Jamie Wilson had it rough in the third inning, which put the Crusaders on a collision course with state destiny. They scored six times to take a 7-0 lead before Mulvane uncorked the offense.

Mason's offensive finally got things rolling in the top of the fourth with two runs. Sophomore catcher Bruce singled then scored when Valeri Larson reached on an error. Reed forced Larson at second and scored an out later on Butler's sizzling single.

Mulvane almost knocked Wellington hurler Tara Strothman out in the fifth with five runs—almost being the key word. Gemi Spatz reached on an error and scored one out later on an error. Lee Cates walked and so did Larson. Reed also walked to fill the sacks before Cates scored on a wild pitch. Two runs scored on a Janelle Wenke base knock and the rally concluded on Butler's RBI single.

The fighting didn't stop there but the scoring almost did. Mulvane made one last run in the seventh when Bruce singled, took second on Larson's fielder's choice, went to third on an error and scored when Crissy Carpenter worked a two-out walk with the bases filled.

"I keep going back to the sixth, that was the difference," said Mason, whose Cats had come to within one strike of going to the state tournament a year ago. "We didn't get the hits out of the middle of the order. We played hard and that's all you can ask. This game doesn't take anything away from the season. We had a good season and some of our people had an outstanding year. We just came up short against Wellington."

The Crusaders saddled the sophomore Wilson with her sixth loss of the year to go with five victories. Junior Susan Wenger came in in the sixth inning and gave up the last run.

Wellington went on to score four times in one inning against the defending regional champion Rose Hill team to upset the No. 1 seeded Rockets in the championship game.

Mulvane Class 4A Regional Results CHAMPIONSHIP

Wellington 4, Rose Hill 1

SEMIFINALS

Mulvane 002 250 1--10 9

Wellington 016 141 x--13 8

Jamie Wilson, Susan Wenger 6, and NiChelle Bruce; Strothman and Yunker.

Rose Hill 10, Andover 0