

It's Not Forever; Cats Exit Early

MANHATTAN—For four innings, it looked like it could go on forever.

It didn't. The Mulvane High School Wildcats wish it had. The Cats stubbed their toe in the late innings to give DeSoto an opportunity to squeeze out a 4-0 victory Friday night, May 29, in the opening round of the Kansas State High School Class 4A State Softball Championship.

The DeSoto Wildcats used that opening momentum to sail to the 4A state championship, dumping Columbus in the title game, 6-1. DeSoto toyed with Pratt, 9-3, in the semifinal while Columbus toppled No. 1 seeded Burlington, 2-0, in the other semifinal Saturday, May 30.

The Cats ended their spectacular season at 16-7 with three of those losses coming to state champions (two to Maize and one to DeSoto). DeSoto capped a 22-2 year.

"It was disappointing because I thought we could do something up there this year," said Cat coach Charlie Mason. "Both times we've gone up there in the last three years, we've run into the hottest team and this year it turned out to be the best team there, too. That first game is always the toughest. I feel, because you're going against the other team's best. And if you would have told me that Kassie was going to pitch the game of her life, I would have thought we were going to win it. She did but we didn't."

Pitching definitely dominated the contest between Wildcats (DeSoto also has a Wildcat as a mascot), but it was a skinny freshman pitcher who finally prevailed in a battle of wills. Mulvane's hurler, Hargrove, a sophomore, was nearly as brilliant as DeSoto's hurler, Ashley Perkins. For four innings, the two traded shutout innings but DeSoto finally scored as Mulvane cracked. After a leadoff single, Hargrove issued her first and only walk of the game. After two strikeouts, it appeared Hargrove was about ready to get out of the inning unscathed when DeSoto grounded the ball to shortstop Cara Ashlock, who went with the short underhanded toss to second instead of firing the ball to first. The toss lifted and went high, causing second sacker Lindsay Kendrick to jump high for the ball as the runner hit the dirt and was safe. That loaded the bases. A run scored from third when the next batter's infield grounder was fumbled by Ashlock, who recovered in time to get the runner rounding third.

But that was all DeSoto needed behind

Kansas Class 4A State Softball Championship

DeSoto 6, Columbus 1

SEMIFINALS

DeSoto 9, Pratt 3

Columbus 2, Burlington 0

FIRST ROUND

DeSoto 000 010 3—4 6 1

Mulvane 000 000 0—0 3 5

Ashley Perkins and Lisa Duncan; Kassie Hargrove and Shelley Richards.

Pratt 3, Basehor 1

Burlington 4, Chapman 3, 12 innings

Columbus 9, Marysville 0



Perkins, who struck out seven Mulvane batters in out-duelling Hargrove.

Mason blamed Mulvane's anemic bats for the loss. "When you get to this level, you have to do something at the plate, and we didn't," stressed Mason, whose Wildcats were knocked out two years ago in a similar game won by Clay Center, 3-0. "Looking at the scores, it looks like DeSoto dominated the rest of the field. That's some consolation for us...but not much.

"I was really surprised a freshman could shut us down but she had good command of her pitches and she had good velocity. That's what pitching is all about. We didn't get the bats on the ball. Three hits isn't much of an offense. And when you're not hitting the ball, you have to play solid defensively, but we made mistakes."

The Wildcats from the Chisholm Trail League finished with five errors, three of them coming in the fateful innings when DeSoto scored.

Although the Kaw Valley League Wildcats had runners on in six of the seven innings, Hargrove had the answer most of the time. She struck out seven and gave up only two earned runs. But DeSoto finally broke Mulvane's will in the top of the 7th inning with three more runs even though only one ball was hit out of the infield, an RBI double by catcher Lisa Duncan. It set up the final two runs as runners scored from third as Mulvane tried to throw them out at



Mulvane pitcher Kassie Hargrove fires another strike at State

the plate. "We knew they were athletic and has speed," emphasized Mason. "The girls made the right play but they just didn't throw them out. DeSoto was quicker than anybody we played all year."

Mulvane's only threat came in the 4th inning and had the MHS girls scored, it would have provided a big lift. Kendrick singled and so did Shelley Richards. Because Perkins was dominating play, Mason tried a fake bunt, steal but Duncan fired a strike to third and nipped the sliding Kendrick for the first out of the inning. Mulvane never recovered as the No. 4 and 5 batters then fanned.

"We just tried to take a chance because

nothing was going on," said Mason. "It took a perfect throw to get her but she did. We still had a runner on second with the middle of our order up there but neither girl made contact.

The rest of Mulvane's offense came in the third inning when Jackie McColpin singled with two out but she died on second.

"There were only eight teams that got there, and we were one of them," remarked Mason. "That's something to be proud of. We might get another shot at DeSoto next year. Hopefully, the results will be different."

That statement could come to pass, too. Mulvane has only one senior on the team and DeSoto started only one senior.