

Bulldogs Show Improvement in League Tourney

By Judy Rogers

The Golden Plains Bulldogs worked hard last week as they played four games in the Western Kansas Liberty League Tournament in Colby. They defeated Palco 57-54 in the first round to advance in the tournament. Following a crushing defeat by Triplains/Brewster, the Bulldogs gathered their resources, improved their game, and played closer matches with Weskan on Friday, losing 31-43, and Cheylin on Saturday where they came from being down by 19 to lose by 5 with a 46-51 final score.

The Bulldogs entered the tournament with only two wins on their record—one over Palco in a double overtime in mid-January. They were scheduled to play Palco once again in the Monday night game on a neutral floor in Grinnell. The game got off to an unusual start for the Bulldogs as the Roosters went to the line for a technical foul, made both shots, and led 2-0 before a single dribble was made. Kade Wessel answered with an opening basket. The Roosters came back but the Bulldogs were determined and pulled ahead 12-8 by the end of the quarter.

Both teams were aggressive in the second resulting in numerous foul shots. Koi Wessel made six of 7 attempts from the free throw line. The Roosters also crashed the boards and brought the game to within 2 by the half with the Bulldogs holding a 26-24 lead.

Following the half time break, the Bulldogs hit the floor with aggressiveness and opened up the lead with two three-pointers from Brett Gerbitz as they pounded the ball inside to the Wessel twins with Kade sinking 11 points and Koi making 4. The Bulldogs surged ahead to a 47-36 lead with a 17-2 run to give them the largest lead they have had so far this season.

The Roosters were not giving up, however, as they kept crawling their way back into the game in the fourth tying the game up at 49 with just under four minutes to play with a series of three pointers. The Bulldogs knew they could beat the Roosters and as the game clock ticked down, the aggressive play sent them to the free throw line. The free shots didn't fall as easily as they had earlier in the game as the Roosters missed 8 in a row. They still added 18 to their score while the Bulldogs only put in 10. Fortunately, the lead the 'Dogs built in the third allowed them to hold on for the win 57-54.

Koi and Kade Wessel led the Bulldog scoring with 23 and 20 points respectively. Brett Gerbitz added 9, Cole Ziegelmeier and Brade Korte with 2 apiece and a free shot from Luna. "We played well but got out of control with fouls," said Kade Wessel. "We almost let it slip away." "We had it in our heads from last time that we didn't want to go into overtime," added Koi Wessel, "so we executed what we needed to do for the win."

The win over Palco allowed the Bulldogs to advance in the tournament to play Triplains/Brewster on Tuesday. The Titans took control of the game early and the Bulldogs never bounced back as the Titans rolled to a 56-12 win over the Bulldogs.

On Friday, the Bulldogs played their third game of the week against the Weskan Coyotes. The Bulldogs go the tip and an early lead as Weskan committed numerous fouls slowing the game down. The Bulldogs put in 11 points in the first, but the Coyotes scored 15. Both teams worked through the second and the Coyotes started putting up 3 point shots-making two as the Bulldogs worked beneath the basket for six points giving Weskan a 26-17 lead at the half.

The boys hustled throughout the second half as they did during the entire game, but their shots wouldn't sink in the third and they were only able to add 4 points in the third allowing the coyotes to pull ahead 38-21. They were not out and kept their intensity throughout the fourth adding another 10 points, holding the Coyotes to 5, to close the spread to 43-31 by the buzzer.

Koi Wessel scored 15 points against the Coyotes. Kade Wessel added 6, Brett Gerbitz-5, Domonic Luna-2, Dawson Spresser-2, and Braden Korte-1.

For their fourth and final game of the tournament, the Bulldogs faced the Cheylin Cougars on Saturday morning. In a first quarter full of turnovers, the Cougars pulled ahead for a 14-8 lead.

The Cougars continued to dominate in the second as they extended their lead over the Bulldogs 11-30. Near the end of the quarter, Braden Korte hit a three for the 'Dogs only field goal of the quarter to make the score 14-30 at the half.

Once again, the Bulldogs regrouped and stepped on the floor in the second half not ready to give up. They increased the intensity of their defense and held the Cougars to 9 in the third while putting in 8 points. The Cougars still led 39-22, but the fourth quarter still needed to be played.

The Bulldogs owned the fourth. The aggressive play by both teams sent them to the foul line numerous times with the Bulldogs sinking 8 of their 11 free shots. The Coyotes shot 18 free throws—only making ten of them. The Cougars' other points in the fourth came from a single field goal. In addition to the free throws, Gerbitz sank two three's and Kade Wessel put in four shots along with one from Koi for the Bulldogs to add 24 points to their total and close the spread to five with the Coyotes claiming the win 51-46. Kade Wessel led the Bulldogs with 16 points along with Gerbitz with 13. Koi Wessel added 11 along with Korte-3, Nick Brown-3, and Luna-1.

"Besides the Triplains/Brewster game, we played three very solid games," said Coach Travis Smith. "Although the wins aren't coming, we are improving." "It is important that we finish the regular season strong so we can be playing our best going into Sub-State," added Smith. The Bulldogs return to regular season play this week as they travel to Hill City on Tuesday and host the Healy Eagles in Rexford on Friday.