

Lady Bulldogs Play in State Championship Game

By Judy Rogers

The Golden Plains Lady Bulldogs stood in the gym for their last home game in February studying the state banners on the north wall and thought there were a number of state banners for the girls' basketball team, but there were no state championships for the girls. They recommitted to their goal to put a state title banner on that wall.

It has been 40 years since Coach Linda Ryan took her Lady Bulldogs to the state title game in 1974—the second year of girls state basketball, and 29 years since head coach Parker Christensen played on the state floor helping bring home the only state championship title. With his daughter, Jordan, playing her senior season, along with Kami Miller, whose father Mike was on the state championship team, and Hailee Spresser, whose Uncle Alan was on that team. Add in senior MiKayla Lobato, whose sister Angel played on the state floor in 2007, and sophomore Kynndra Rush, whose mother is the assistant boys basketball coach and coached a Brewster girls team to the state tournament, the Lady Bulldogs have a strong starting lineup and the girls knew this was their time.

The Lady Bulldogs won the trip to the state tournament by knocking off the Triplains/Brewster Lady Titans in the Sub-State Championship game. They received a #3 seed with a 20-3 record to start off the tournament. Their first game was against the Wilson Lady Dragons, whom they had defeated last season for third in state.

The Lady Bulldogs had no trouble with the Lady Dragons as they pulled ahead 11-7 in the first with a quarter ending three from freshman Gabrielle Schiltz, extending their lead to 26-17 by half time. Although Wilson put up a battle, the Lady Bulldogs held strong for the 57-37 win in order to advance in the tournament. Christensen scored 16 and Spresser 15 along with Miller-8, Maddy Walz-6, Lobato-5, Schiltz-3, Rachael Ritter-2, and Rush-2.

The girls faced the Bucklin Red Aces for the semi-finals on Friday. The Lady Aces were the #2 seed coming into the tournament, defeating St. Johns-Beloit in overtime to advance. Following an early free throw from Miller and a quick shot by Spresser, Christensen went on a six point run. Lobato hit a final shot to put the Lady Bulldogs up 11-7 at the end of the first.

The girls worked the ball well and played strong defense throughout the game, but the Lady Aces were equally determined. Although the Bucklin girls would gain a one point lead during the second, the Lady Bulldogs always answered and slipped past the Lady Aces for a one-point lead 24-23 at half time.

Christensen and Spresser did all the third quarter scoring, but the Lady Aces matched them as the Lady 'Dogs still held a 33-32 lead going into the fourth. The fourth opened with two free shots from Spresser, who did a great job from the line all night, and a three from Christensen—who hit several key threes throughout the game. With the Lady Bulldogs up by 6 early in the quarter, Bucklin called a time out to regroup.

Back on the floor, the Lady Bulldogs remained calm and composed as things on the floor intensified and the Lady Aces increased the pressure. Rush made a couple of free throws—she didn't miss all night, before Spresser went on an 8 point run.

With just over a minute to play and a 5 point lead, Coach Christensen called a timeout to warn his girls that “the pressure is coming” cautioning them not to get too comfortable with their lead just yet.

His words were prophetic as Bucklin stole the ball, making the layup, and closing the gap to 3. The shooter was fouled and went to the line for an additional shot but missed. They did get

the ball back, as the Lady Bulldogs increased their defense. Lobato fouled out and the Lady Aces went to the line for two. They made the first shot, missing the second, and the Lady Bulldogs had a one point lead with 32.8 seconds on the clock.

Coach Christensen called another timeout and encouraged the girls to “take care of the ball now!” Jordan Christensen received foul #6 from Bucklin followed by #7 to send her to the line for a one and one. She made both to put the Lady ‘Dogs up by three. Bucklin made one more shot to again be down by one with 13.8 seconds to play. The shooter missed her and-one attempt to tie the game. They fouled Christensen one more time, calling a final timeout.

During that time, with a one-point lead, and 10 seconds to play, Coach Christensen encouraged the girls to “believe in yourself” as he warned them “No fouls! They’re putting the pressure on—you gotta move!” Jordan went back on the floor hitting both shots with her teammates on the other end of the floor, ready to put on defensive pressure.

The Lady Aces pushed the ball down the floor, attempting a three pointer to tie the game, but missed. They made one more effort by sending Spresser to the free throw line for a one and one, but she missed the first shot. Bucklin rebounded and hustled to the other end, but ran out of time as the Lady Bulldogs won 52-49 and a chance at the state title.

Spresser and Christensen each scored 20 points along with 4 each from Miller and Rush and 2 apiece from Lobato and Rachael Ritter. The girls made 14 of 17 free throws with Rush hitting 100% and Christensen hitting 7 of 8-including all four at the end of the game.

The Lady Bulldogs stepped on the floor on Saturday to face the #1 seed Baileyville B&B Lady Falcons. The Lady Bulldogs were jittery at the start of the game, making simple mistakes as the Lady Falcons hit the first points of the game. Jordan Christensen tied it up with a 3 taking the lead with a follow up shot. The Lady Falcons took over from their and the Lady Bulldogs never regained the lead ending the first quarter trailing 9-14.

The Lady Falcons controlled the second quarter doubling their score and holding the Lady ‘Dogs to a single three-point shot from Kami Miller to end the half 28-12. The Lady ‘Dogs improved their scoring in the third with baskets from Rachael Ritter, Miller, and Hailee Spresser but many of their shots were off and they struggled under the boards. The Lady Bulldogs fell behind 20-48 at the end of the third.

This wasn’t the Lady Bulldogs first trip to the state tournament, and they behaved like the ladies they are as they never gave up and pursued the basket throughout the fourth and doubled their score to 40. The Lady Falcons fought inside and added eleven more to their 59-40 championship win naming the Lady Bulldogs state runner-up.

“I didn’t want it to be over,” said Spresser, who scored 11 of her 12 total in the game during the last 8 minutes of her high school basketball career. “I am so proud of what we accomplished.” Christensen, Rachael Ritter, and Kami Miller each put in 7 points for the Lady Bulldogs along with Walz-3, and Lobato-2. It was the feeling of all their parents, family, friends, and community supporters that this group of girls truly are ‘champions’ as they cheered them throughout the season and the girls played like champions to the very end.