

GP Seniors Three-Peat for State
By Judy Rogers

Kami Miller, Kynndra Rush, and Maddy Walz will be heading to the state basketball tournament for their third time after the Golden Plains girls defeated Wheatland/Grinnell in a hard-fought Sub-State Championship game on Saturday. These girls were on the third place state team as freshmen and the state runner-up team their sophomore year. The Thunderhawks beat them out in the finals of sub-state their junior year, but the Lady Bulldogs defeated the 'Hawks on Saturday to win their third trip to the state tournament.

As the #2 seed in the Grainfield sub-state, the Bulldogs received a bye for the quarter-final round. They faced the #3 Logan Lady Trojans on Friday, March 4, for semi-finals. The Bulldogs had defeated the Trojans in a 4 point contest in January so were well aware this would be a very competitive game.

The Bulldogs gained a 6-5 lead in the first quarter. They continued to work together to extend their lead to 19-8 by the half. The Trojans rallied in the third, but the 'Dogs were able to maintain a 29-20 lead as they headed into the fourth.

The Bulldogs were able to hang on to their lead throughout the final minutes as the Trojans narrowed the spread to 34-30 with two minutes to play. With both teams going to the free throw line, the girls were able to trade shots to win 39-35 and advance to the championship game.

Freshman KayCee Miller had a standout game with 21 points. Maddy Walz scored 7, Gabrielle Schiltz-4, Kaylie Schaben-4, and Kami Miller-3. "We knew we had to play to our fullest potential against Logan," said Morgan Ritter, "or it would all be over."

The Bulldogs were ready to claim their championship title from the #1 ranked Wheatland/Grinnell Thunderhawks. The Bulldogs lost the Sub-State Championship game to the 'Hawks last year. They had defeated the 'Hawks at the Castle Rock Tournament in December, but the 'Hawks claimed wins at the league tournament and in the regular season. "We all shared the same mindset that we didn't want our season to end," said Maddy Walz. "After they knocked us out last year, we were determined not to let it happen again."

KayCee Miller opened with 5 points. The 'Hawks answered with 5 and pulled ahead 9-14. A three from Miller at the end of the quarter had the 'Dogs trailing 12-14.

The second quarter was filled with outside three's as the girls traded baskets. With three minutes until the half, Golden Plains gained a one point advantage. A free throw and another 3 from Miller gave the 'Dogs a 28-25 lead at half time.

Kami Miller opened the second half with a three-point play. Gabrielle Schiltz, KayCee Miller, added baskets as the Bulldog defense kept the 'Hawks from scoring for nearly 5 minutes. The 'Dogs held a 10 point lead with 2 minutes to play in the quarter before the 'Hawks closed it to 6. A buzzer bucket from Kynndra Rush put the 'Dogs up 39-31.

The last 8 minutes were filled with cheers from both sides of the gym as the girls battled to the finish. KayCee Miller hit another three-she had six in the game-as the 'Hawks struggled to close the gap.

The 'Dogs went on a shooting drought as the 'Hawks brought the game to within two points 42-40 with 2 ½ minutes remaining in the game. Kami Miller hit a basket and a time out was called. The 'Hawks made a free throw followed by a Bulldog free shot from Kami with just over a minute to play. A tip ball went to Golden Plains and Kami was sent to the line once more. She missed both attempts and Wheatland called a timeout with 29 seconds on the clock.

KayCee Miller was fouled but fell to the floor with a leg cramp. She limped to the line for two and made her first shot. Wheatland called another timeout after her first shot. She missed the second shot and the 'Dogs were ahead 46-41 with 14 second to play. The 'Hawks fouled her again at the 12 second mark. She made both her free throws as the final buzzer sounded with a Bulldog win 48-42. "The noise from the crowd really helped us keep our energy and focus," said Gabrielle Schiltz. "We appreciate the support of our crowd and the support from the students from other teams during the game."

KayCee Miller again led the Bulldogs with season high 27 points. Gabrielle Schiltz added 7, Kami Miller-6, Kynndra Rush-4, Maddy Walz-2, and Morgan Ritter-2. "We came out ready to play every game with the mindset that there would be no regrets," said KayCee Miller.

"Wow!! I still can't find the words to explain how I'm feeling right now!!" exclaimed Kami Miller on Sunday morning. "I am so proud of my team!!! Last night was all possible because of the hard work and dedication we have put in these past months!!! Every single team member contributed to that win last night!! Whether it be showing more leadership or giving us the energy we needed! Everyone did their job and we succeeded!! We couldn't have done it without our wonderful student section, students from other teams, coaches, parents, and amazing crowd!! I have never played in a game that was more intense!!"

The girls are ranked #5 in the Class 1A Division II state tournament at the United Wireless Arena in Dodge City. They will play the Dighton Hornets at 8:15 pm on Thursday, March 10.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to play in state with my sister, Kami," said KayCee Miller. "We will play hard, compete hard, and leave it all on the floor in Dodge." "It's an honor to be able to play in the state tournament three of our four years of high school," said Kynndra Rush. "We couldn't have done this well without the support and dedication of Coach Christensen and Coach Shaw." "This isn't the end though!" added Kami. "On to Dodge we go!!!! Let's go show them who Golden Plains is!!!!"