

Bulldogs Finish Third in League

By Judy Rogers

The Golden Plains Bulldogs finished third in the Western Kansas Liberty League Basketball Tournament with a win over Triplains/Brewster in Colby on Saturday. "I'm proud of how we did," said Koi Wessel. "We accomplished one of our goals for the season—to place in the league tournament."

The Bulldogs, who were seeded #5 upset the #4 Weskan Coyotes in the quarterfinal game on Thursday in Grainfield. Weskan had defeated the 'Dogs by 14 in late December so they came prepared for a battle. The 'Dogs got the tip and AJ Camacho quickly put two on the board. The Coyotes answered and the battle had begun.

The Coyotes put on the pressure defense, which forced multiple turnovers. The Bulldogs worked hard but found themselves behind 8-15 at the end of the first. In the second quarter, the 'Dogs worked to get the ball inside to the Wessel twins—Kade and Koi. Their strategy worked and the twins put in 16 points. The Coyotes didn't back down their offense and extended their lead to 24-30 by half.

The Coyotes maintained their lead for much of the third quarter as the Bulldogs chipped away, stayed calm, and played their game. Midway through the third, the 'Dogs tied the game up at 35. Both teams shot from the line as the fouls accumulated. The Coyotes were able to maintain a 39-38 lead going into the fourth.

With fouls accumulating on players on both sides of the court, the final quarter was crucial. The score was still tied up midway through the fourth. The Bulldogs pulled ahead 47-45 with 1:40 on the clock. A steal by Brett Gerbitz handed the ball to Koi Wessel to extend the lead.

The 'Dogs finished the game on the free throw line for the 52-46 win. "It was exciting to get the upset," said Kade Wessel. "It shows how much we have improved since the start of the season." Kade Wessel led the team with 20 points followed by Koi Wessel with 18. AJ Camacho added 12 and Dawson Spresser 2.

The Bulldogs faced the Logan Trojans in the semi-final round on Friday at the Colby Community Building. The Bulldogs had just played the state ranked Trojans, losing by 6, and knew they would have to work hard against this quality team.

The Trojans took the lead 11-7 in the first. The Bulldogs added a couple of three's from Brett Gerbitz and Dawson Spresser in the second, but the Trojans extended their lead 20-13.

Six points from Kade Wessel and a three from AJ Camacho put the 'Dogs back in the game as their defense held the Trojans to four closing the spread to 22-24. The game was still within reach as Camacho hit another three to bring the game within one. Logan went on an 8 point run before the 'Dogs hit again—another 3 from Gerbitz with less than a minute to go. Camacho added another 3 and two free shots but it wasn't enough as the 'Dogs fell 33-39.

"I am proud of the effort of my boys tonight," said Coach Travis Smith. "We lost to a top five ranked team; I couldn't ask any more than what they gave." Camacho led the Bulldogs with 14 points—including four three-pointers. Kade Wessel added 8, Brett Gerbitz-6, Dawson Spresser-3, and Koi Wessel-2. Twenty-one of the Bulldogs 33 points came from 7 three-pointers.

The Bulldogs were pumped and ready to win the third place game on Saturday afternoon. They met the Triplains/Brewster Titans on the floor of the Community Building in Colby. The two teams had met in early January with the Titans winning by 13. This was the first time since 2011 the Golden Plains boys had finished this high in the league tournament and they were determined to win it.

The boys played a balanced game as each team was patient and worked for their shots. Tied 11-11 at the end of the first, it was evident this would be a close game.

The Bulldogs continued to play with focused energy as they pulled ahead by 4 only to have the Titans match them. With a 17 all score, Camacho hit a bucket and Koi Wessel made a free throw. Camacho then stole the ball from the Titans, pushed it down the floor and passed it off to Jesus Aragon who made a bucket at the buzzer to give the Bulldogs a 22-17 lead at the half.

The Bulldogs continued to work the ball around the floor as they patiently waited for their shot. This enabled them to extend their lead to 37-25 going into the fourth. Between quarters, Coach Smith kept the boys calm and focused reminding them they had 8 more minutes to play encouraging them to finish the game with four consistent quarters of play.

The fourth was a long quarter of free throws as both teams were aggressively trying to control the ball. Golden Plains' calmness helped them focus on the basket as they made their shots to win the game 48-39.

The Bulldogs had three players in double-figures including Kade Wessel-15, AJ Camacho-10, and Brett Gerbitz-10. Koi Wessel added 8, Jesus Aragon-4, and Dawson Spresser-1 to finish the tournament with a third place victory.

"It was great to finish in third place," said Aragon. "We did it with teamwork, not one-on-one. We have evolved as a team." "We played with confidence," added Kade Wessel. "We knew we could do it. We had a good crowd and appreciate their support. We plan to continue to improve to reach our ultimate goal of qualifying for state."

The Bulldogs will have a chance to test their teamwork and skill on Tuesday, February 9, as the season continues with the Hill City Ringnecks in Rexford.