

## Wildcats win thriller; clinch playoff berth

Written by Don Wallace

Saturday, 14 February 2009 12:51

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It was a thriller on Friday the 13th, but the results were not frightening for Sulphur Springs fans.

Just like Jason, the Wildcats came back and made the playoffs for the first time since 2002. And without using a machete or wearing a hockey mask.

This time it was the Mavericks leaving town spooked.

Sulphur Springs took a 53-47 overtime win over Marshall at home Friday night to secure at least fourth place in the District 13-4A race.

The Hallsville Bobcats won 67-65 at Texas High Friday to set up a showdown Tuesday at the Sulphur Springs gym for playoff seedings.

Hallsville is 5-6 in district while the Wildcats are 6-5. A win Tuesday would give the Wildcats third place, while a loss would secure fourth. Hallsville must win to get in or fall into a possible tiebreaker with Marshall and Mount Pleasant.

Joey Davis was Mr. Clutch scoring nine points in the game for the Wildcats, including four consecutive free throws in the four-minute overtime stanza. Sulphur Springs outscored the visiting Mavs 10-4 in the extra period.

Free throws were very important as the Wildcats made 14-of-25 shots from the charity stripe.

"Free throws were huge for us. We'd shot more than 3,700 free throws in recent practices hitting 77 percent, tonight we hit 64 percent which is much better than our average of about 50 percent," said Sulphur Springs head basketball coach Braughn Curtis.

The Wildcats played well down the stretch protecting the ball and limiting scoring chances by Marshall.

"We really responded well when we had to," Curtis said. "For us to do this and make the playoffs is unbelievable. We play so well at home, we need to duplicate that and take it on the road with us. We got our sixth win and now we know that we can finish no lower than fourth place in the district."

Jonathan Lee was the leading scorer for Sulphur Springs with all of his 15 points coming in the second half.

The Wildcats out-rebounded the Mavs 23-9 in the second half.

Xavier Else, a driving quick guard for Marshall paced his team with 14 points.

The fourth quarter started with the Mavs holding a 32-29 lead. Free throws from Lee and Nash kept the Wildcats close. Lee scored while driving the hoop and was fouled and he sank the following free throw to complete the three-point play. Sulphur Spring got the first lead of the second half as they edged ahead 35-34 with 4:31 left in the fourth.

The Mavs would not back up and Marcus Smith was left wide open and nailed a three ball from the corner pocket, the 3-point bucket gave the visitors a brief 37-35, The Wildcats showed what they were made of answering with 3-point missile by Alvin Frazier to regain the lead to 39-38 less than a minute later.

Else scored off a free throw and then took advantage of a Sulphur Springs turnover to drive down the lane for a point blank bucket. The Wildcats fell behind 41-38. But there was no panic in these 'Cats as Lee popped in two free throws at the 2:32 mark and with an Anthony Mills fallaway jumper Sulphur Springs bolted back ahead 42-41 with less than two minutes in the fourth frame.

Darius Bryant hit a 12-foot jumper from the wing as the Mavs went back ahead 43-42. Lee made one of two free throws with 1:07 left and the game was tied at 43-all.

Sulphur Springs ran 52 seconds from the clock before calling a time out with 4.7 seconds left to

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set up the final shot. The Wildcats did not get a good look at the goal and last shot missed the mark and forced the overtime period with the game tied at 43.

Once in the overtime period, Sulphur Springs never trailed and seemed to get a second wind.

Buckets from Nash and Lee in the lane quick gave the Wildcats a 47-42 lead. The Mavericks came back to tied the game at 47-all following points from Else on a field goal and free throws. The final two minutes of the extra stanza saw the Wildcats close like a champion with Nash scoring then blocking a shot while Davis made four-of-four free throws. The Wildcats held on to take the important 53-47 win.

In the first half, neither team could get rolling. Both teams shot less than 30 percent from the field.

The teams traded points early with Sulphur Springs held a 14-11 lead after the first period ended. The Wildcats got 3-pointers from Gage Williams and Joey Davis.

Sulphur Springs continued to dominate the boards, but lost their shooting touch. The Mavs had all the momentum at the half holding a 23-18 lead.

Nash erupted for seven points and four rebounds in the third period to keep the Wildcats close.

The third period ended with Marshall narrowly ahead 32-29. The Wildcats rallied for 24 points in the fourth period and overtime period combined and went on to score the 53-47 victory.

"We executed our plan well and we were able to get the win,"Curtis said. "For us to make the playoffs after going 1-9 in district last year is great. Nobody gave us a chance at the start of the year because of our record last year. We did it with a lot of the same players."

The coach added, "We'd love to have another big crowd Tuesday. The fans were great Friday. They mean a lot to us."

### SCORING BOX (varsity)

Marshall 17-12-9-11-4-47

Sulphur Springs 14-4-11-14-10-53

Marshall- Tracy Carson 5, Xavier Else 14, Marcus Smith 9, Kethan Thomas 2, Darius Bryant 4, Eddie Allen 9, Ketoran Thomas 4.

3-pointers, Allen (3), Smith (2).

Sulphur Springs - Bryant Jackson 1, Anthony Mills 5,Alvin Frazier 4, Gage Williams 3, Joey Davis 9, Kedrick Dial 6, Colton Nash 8, Jonathan Lee 15.

3-pointers - Frazier, Williams, Davis.

Junior varsity -Marshall 55, Sulphur Springs 47

Sulphur Springs - Bubba Wright 11, Jaquvian Willis 16, Trey Clayton 2, Kwame Goodson 11, Jacobs 2, George Green 3.

Freshmen-Marshall 58, Sulphur Springs 53

Sulphur Springs - Cody Clayton 17, Justin Owens 7, Tevin Norris 7, Calise Frazier 3, Jaylon Perry 2, K.J. Taylor 9, Erick Simmons 7.

NEXT UP - Hallsville at Sulphur Springs, Tuesday, 9, JV, V, 5 p.m.