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Sports Update

Plano fastbreak quickly cracks Samuell in tourney opener

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IRVING -- Regardless of the quarter, time on the clock or personnel on the court, the Plano Senior boys basketball team piled on the production in droves Thursday night.

A still-winless Dallas Samuell acquiesced as the proverbial lamb being led to the slaughter, unable to weather a furious Wildcat rally to close the first half of a 65-33 pummeling in the opening round of the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Basketball Classic.

"We started out really sluggish, but eventually we got it going pretty good," said Phil Parlin, Plano head coach. "It's great to get games like this where you get the opportunity to play a lot of guys and get some players some minutes they haven't seen this season."

Be it starters or reserves, the Spartans were powerless opposite Plano.

The first string opened the floodgates in the form of an 8-1 run to round out the half and carried a 29-16 advantage to the locker room.

The Wildcats mustered that edge by creating in transition through opportunistic defense; a valued asset with Samuell lobbing a variety of box-one or 1-3-1 zones.

"We haven't worked on much zone this year because we're not going to see it a lot," Parlin said, "but it was good because we got a chance to go against it. And there were so many gaps that guys could have found, but it was good to play against."

The Spartan zone flustered Plano's half-court offense early on. Still, with Samuell's inability to hold onto the ball, the Wildcats found ways to pile up points in forcing nine first-half turnovers. Senior Austin Mitchell was one of the early benefactors of an aggressive Wildcat defense, drawing a pair of and-1s off steals in the second quarter.

Mitchell scored all of his game-high 15 points in the first half.

"[Mitchell] knows he's the go-to guy and that he's the leader of this team," Parlin said. "We look to him to be our main cog offensively and defensively. We've got high expectations for him and he's done a good job with that so far."

Mitchell wasn't alone though.

The Wildcats bench picked up where the starters left off for the bulk of the second half.

Plano reserves totaled 38 points, sticking to the combination of aggressive defense to set up the manic pace that characterized the Wildcats' transition game.

"You know me, I always want to play that way," Parlin said. "I think the kids enjoy playing it that way and I think we've got the guys to play at that pace."

Every Wildcat earned his way into the stat book Thursday, with 11 players scoring. Behind Mitchell, junior Dustin Bercutt added nine points, while sophomore Broderick Perkins and senior Connor Pitts each managed eight.

As was the case early on, several Plano baskets were set up via turnovers, with the Wildcats forcing 21 takeaways on the night. No two portrayed the second half better than senior Malcolm Mann converting a steal into a dunk for a 42-22 lead midway through the third quarter and mere minutes later, sealing a layup at the buzzer following a steal for a 48-22 edge Plano carried into the fourth quarter.

The third frame marked Plano's most lopsided of the night, outscoring Samuell, 19-6.

"This has been such a fun team to coach because they work so hard and play so well together," Parlin said. "It's fun to have games like this sometimes where everybody gets a chance to contribute."

After hanging within three points at 11-8 after one quarter, the Spartans wouldn't get any closer, failing to convert many looks within the flow of their offense. Samuell sunk just nine field goals, relying on free throws to account for much of its offense in the second half. The Spartans shot 10-of-16 from the stripe in a second half that yielded just 17 points.

Curtis Woods knocked down five of his team-high nine points from the line, with Harrison Hamm II chipping in a pair of 3-pointers.

The Wildcats were more fruitful with their chances, relying on the passing of Pitts, junior Teekay Biti and senior Dwayne Hicks to break down the Samuell zone as the game wore on.

"It was great to get [Pitts] back tonight," Parlin said. "He just came back from ACL surgery after tearing his knee up in May. He's worked his tail off since then to get back and I know this means so much to him. He just got released to play today."

The Wildcats' second-round tilt proved less fortuitous, with tourney host Carrollton Ranchview dealing Plano a 57-47 loss Friday night. Mitchell and senior Kian Gharnbanejad each compiled eight points in the defeat.

Following tournament play, the Wildcats travel to meet Lake Highlands at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.