

Kennedy girls knock off Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Last season, the Kennedy girls went into the state soccer tournament ranked seventh and ended up taking the title by beating the top three teams in three days.

They're hoping the underdog role pays off this year as well.

"We're excited to prove everyone wrong again," said Cougar captain Tory Harman after leading her squad into next week's regional finals with a 4-1 win over Washington Wednesday night at Kingston Stadium.

"We've had kind of a bumpy season, and a lot of people have written us off. So we're out to prove something."

Kennedy started the year ranked No.2 but lost right off the bat to Ankeny in a rematch of the 2012 championship final. It's been an up and down season since then.

Now ranked 10th in Class 3A with a 13-5 record, the Cougars face No.8 Iowa City West Monday at 7 p.m. at Kingston to advance to state and defend their crown.

In a game Wednesday delayed almost two hours because of lightning, it took Kennedy awhile to overcome a gambit by Washington (6-7) to position a fortress in front of its goal.

"By setting up deep and putting 10 players behind the ball, they forced us to play a little differently," said Kennedy Coach Andrew McKnight. "We play with a lot of pace, but we had to use patience and composure."

While the Cougars were constantly on the attack, their first goal came six minutes into the match when freshman Carly Langhurst punched in a short shot on an assist by Harman.

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“My role,” said the senior set-up specialist, “is to hold the ball and get it to our shooters in a position to score.”

It took another 16 minutes before Kennedy was again able to penetrate the Warrior wall around the net.

“With all those defenders in the box,” explained Harman, “we had to try and draw them out and then attack them with our speed.”

The Cougars’ second goal, though, came on a nifty set play from the left corner when Kaela Dickerman inbounded to Emily Feltes, got the ball right back and smoked it past Washington goalie Sophia Malcolm.

Although the Warriors rarely ventured past midfield, they trailed only 2-0 at halftime.

Kennedy quickly scored again after the intermission when freshman Anna Frerichs blasted a straight-on, short-range penalty kick following a foul by Malcolm.

Cougar goalkeeper Olivia Weigel returned the favor when she was whistled for catching the ball outside the box. Replacement goalie Stephanie Botkin batted away the initial free kick by CJ Cooper, but Warrior Sarah Lowenberg scored on the ricochet.

Kennedy’s Carlee Ellsworth upped the margin to 4-1 at the 12-minute mark by looping a long floater into an empty net vacated by Malcolm.

The Cougars closed out the game by playing keep-away the rest of the way.

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“We have a lot of technically talented players,” McKnight said, “who are capable of keeping possession of the ball.”