

Cougars top Ames for 9th win

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana does not want to reveal how many basketball games he thought the Cougars would win this season, but it's probably safe to say he didn't think his club would have an attractive 9-3 record at this point.

His grin gave it away.

Kennedy found a way to win another game Saturday night with a 58-50 verdict over the Ames Little Cyclones at the Kennedy gym.

"We just have to keep finding ways to win, because we're not overly talented," said Fontana. "We have to try and do all the little things."

The Cougars do not have a single player who's averaging in double figures. The starting lineup is not set in stone and the substitution pattern may vary depending on the opponent and what Fontana needs off the bench.

They shoot free throws fairly well (but not always), take pretty good care of the ball (but not always), usually take good shots (but not always) and play fairly smart basketball (but not always).

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They showed their schizophrenic sides at times Saturday night, but did enough to win the ballgame after nearly squandering a 16-point lead.

Kennedy senior Patrick Martin thinks the formula for success has been fairly simple.

"We're going hard in practice and we're listening to our coaches," he said. "We're a solid unit right now."

Martin has been fairly consistent in recent games with 11, 11 and 15 points in the last three outings, raising his average to 8.4 per game. Johnathon Koelling is the leading scorer at 8.8 points and Benjamin Struss is third at 8.3.

Anthony Carter contributes 7.1 points and Blake Murdock is sitting at 6.3 points after tossing in a game-high 17 Saturday night.

Those are not pretty scoring averages, but any of those players can lead the team in scoring and foil an opponent's game plan. "We have balance," Fontana noted.

Fontana normally uses nine or 10 guys, looking for the right combinations and removing players who are not performing well.

"They better be focused and ready to go or they might not play as much as they'd like to," he said. "That's been nice to have that flexibility off the bench with our personnel."

"That has been the common denominator since Christmas."

Austin Holzer and Drew Heitland, a pair of beefy offensive linemen from the Kennedy football team, give the Cougars some muscle near the basket. The Cougars also have played good

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defense at times and held Ames to just 11 points in the first half.

Brandon Buck, a member of the bench brigade, gave Kennedy a 39-23 bulge with a floater to start the fourth quarter. The Cougars carried a 50-38 lead into the final two minutes of the game, but Ames (7-7) took advantage of Kennedy mistakes and pulled within 54-48 with 48 seconds to play.

Kennedy committed a turnover to give the Little Cyclones a change to get closer, but Justin Slotter missed a 3-pointer that would have pulled the visitors within three points with 25 seconds remaining.

Murdock made two free throws for Kennedy to make it 56-48 with 22.8 seconds left. Ames pulled within 56-50 on a layup by Sam Straub with 10 seconds remaining, but Koelling finished the game with a layup for the eight-point margin.

Murdock hit three 3-pointers en route to his 17 points. Martin scored 11 points in the first half and finished with 15. Koelling grabbed 10 rebounds. Carter had five rebounds and five assists.

"We're glad to be 9-and-3," said Fontana, "and our goal is just to have continuous improvement."

Straub went 11-for-11 at the foul line and scored 24 points for Ames. Slotter finished with 13.

AMES (50): Straub 6 11-11 24, Mumm 1 0-0 2, Rathe 0 2-4 2, Shane 3 3-3 9, Chol 0 0-0 0, Slotter 4 2-4 13, Lenz 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 18-22 50.

KENNEDY (58): Murdock 5 4-6 17, Carter 2 3-4 7, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Bardsley 0 2-2 2, Buck 2 0-0 5, Martin 7 1-1 15, Koelling 2 0-0 4, Holzer 1 2-2 4, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Struss 1 2-2 4. Totals 20 14-17 58.

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Halftime - Kennedy 23, Ames 11. 3-point goals - Ames 4 (Sloter 3, Straub 1), Kennedy 4 (Murdock 3, Buck 1).