

Jefferson boys take care of Prairie

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Maybe it's because several of the players competed against each other for years in AAU ball, but the boys game Tuesday night between Jefferson and Prairie seemed more like something you'd see at the Salvation Army gym.

The refs, for the most part, let them play without too much concern about fouls. There were quite a few wayward passes and loose balls on the court. And, as is so often the case in kids' league contests, a few key players scored most of the points while the rest looked on.

In a matchup of two struggling teams trying to bounce back for postseason play, the J-Hawks prevailed 58-45 at Jefferson.

Jefferson won because it had three guys playing at their best and the Prairie Hawks had only one.

"The games with Prairie are kind of a rivalry for us," said Jefferson senior Ky Kramer, one of three on his team in double figures with 14 points. "The seniors played on different teams in AAU. And we've played against each other in other sports, too.

"So, it's nice to get a win over them."

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And since it's the only time they've faced one another this season, Kramer and fellow senior Creighton Robinson can claim bragging rights.

Jefferson (10-10, 7-8 MVC) came into its final regular-season home game having lost eight of its last 11, including three in a row.

"We've struggled lately," said Robinson, who drained three 3-pointers and ended up with 17 points. "Some injuries and just a lot of different things. But I think this game put us back on track. It's a good win going into the substate."

Junior Jacob Olson, the team's high scorer who's been off his game a bit recently, battled a virus that left him winded and on the bench in short spurts. He still came out his slump to hit eight of 15 shots and finish with 18 points.

"I've been sick," he said, "and I couldn't catch my breath. But it didn't seem to hurt my shooting."

Olson said Tuesday's effort was the best the J-Hawks have played as a team in some time. "We were looking for open shots for each other," he explained, "and they didn't know who to guard."

On one nifty give-and-go early in the game, Olson tossed the ball into the post to Layne Sullivan and scored an open layup on a return pass. That broke a 7-7 tie.

Robinson connected on his third trey of the night at the 4:30 mark in the third quarter, then immediately stole the ball and fed Olson for a fast break that stretched the margin to 10.

Jefferson opened the fourth quarter with another assist from Robinson to Olson. Each of them then scored on floaters in the lane to put the J-Hawks ahead by 12 with five minutes to go.

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Plagued by poor shooting all night, Prairie (5-15, 4-11 MVC) could not close the gap. The Hawks have now lost 10 of their last 12 games and six in a row.

Prairie made just 33 percent of its shots Tuesday and was only four of 21 from 3-point range.

While Michael Mims and Tom Eilers each connected on a pair of treys and Demetrius Harper came off the bench to supply some much-needed energy, it was senior Jace Hanna who was the only consistent threat throughout the game. Playing with his usual hard-charging style, he supplied much of the offensive punch for Prairie with 19 points.

"We just couldn't hit our shots all night," said Hanna, nursing a sprained ankle he suffered in practice last Saturday. "We tried to fight through it. Usually, we can hit our 3-pointers. But not tonight. We were pretty lousy."

The Hawks close their regular season at home Thursday against Waterloo East, then host Iowa City High Monday to open the substate.

Jefferson, meanwhile, travels to Cedar Falls Thursday and comes home Monday to face Ottumwa in the first round of tournament play.

PRAIRIE (45): Michael Mims 2 0-0 6, Ty Mougin 0 0-0 0, Jace Hanna 6 7-7 19, Bryce Meeker 1 0-0 2, Tom Eilers 2 0-0 6, Dylan Kuchemann 0 2-4 2, Demetrius Harper 3 1-3 7, Tyler Butz 1 0-0 2, Jalen Rima 0 1-2 1. Totals 15 11-16 45.

JEFFERSON (58): Jacob Olson 8 2-2 18, Creighton Robinson 5 4-4 17, Ky Kramer 5 3-4 14, Layne Sullivan 1 5-7 7, Marcus Floyd 0 0-0 0, Jake Van Oort 1 0-0 2, Brandon Wiederin 0 0-0 0, Lucas Larson 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 14-17 58.

Halftime – Jefferson 25, Prairie 20. 3-point goals – Prairie 4 (Mims 2, Eilers 2), Jefferson 4 (Robinson 3, Kramer 1).