

No.8 Cougars belt No.10 Warriors

Written by Carl Gonder

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Inside domination. Inside presence. Call it what you will.

It added up to an impressive win.

The No.8-ranked Kennedy Cougars used their inside superiority and great defense to stamp an easy 74-49 victory over No.10 Washington at the Warrior gym Friday night in a Mississippi Valley Conference girls basketball game.

Washington dropped to 5-2 overall and had a five-game winning streak halted. Kennedy improved to 7-1. The contest was a non-conference affair on a day when all Cedar Rapids schools were cancelled due to the icy conditions.

Eastern Illinois University-signee Morgan Martin had three blocked shots, 13 rebounds (six on the offensive glass) and 15 points to spearhead a balanced and impressive Cougar frontline attack.

It all added up to a dominating win.

"I thought we were well-rounded as a team," said Martin, the state's second-leading rebounder. "We came out strong in the first half, got us a really nice lead and we just capitalized on it in the

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second half.”

Kennedy raced to a 26-13 edge after the opening eight minutes of play, forced the Warriors into missing their last nine shots of the second quarter and led 41-19 at the half.

Kennedy boss Tony Vis employed a triangle-and-two defense on Danielle Franklin and Aleena Hobbs. Franklin had only five points in the first half, but finished with 18 points on 6-of-13 shooting. Hobbs scored 17 on 4-of-15 field goal shooting.

The duo came into the game averaging 22 and 17 points, respectively, and scored 32 of their team’s 35 points through three quarters.

No other Warrior scored more than six points.



“We got out of the gate really well,” Vis said. “When you put up 26 (points) in the first quarter, offensively you get into a rhythm. And then, defensively we wanted to make it really hard on Dani and Aleena. We made them earn their points.”

Vis said the junk defense was part of the strategy, but he is more concerned with the longer view of the season.

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“We are really enjoying the process and enjoying each other,” Vis said of his talented team. “One of the things we talk about is as you try to make the climb to the top of the mountain, if you don’t enjoy the experience and build some relationships, you will find when you get to the top of the mountain, it is cold and lonely.”

The 6-foot-2 Martin joined forces with 6-foot junior Stephanie Botkin (16 points, six rebounds), Madi Meier (14 points) and Jordan Holmes (12 points) to wreak havoc on the Warriors.

The Cougars had 12 more field goals than Washington, including a bevy of putbacks, layins and shots inside the paint.

Botkin said she, too, likes what she sees.

“Setting that tone in the first quarter got us prepared for the whole game,” Botkin said. “We had nice bench energy and we were really feeding off each other. That energy in the first quarter set the tone for the rest of the game.”

Botkin said the “face-guarding” tactics on Hobbs and all-stater Franklin were a big key. “They are their primary scorers and it worked pretty well,” she said.

Botkin said she thinks the Cougars have the goods to climb the mountain to Des Moines. “We definitely have the potential to get to the state tournament if we make sure we stay together, work hard and stay positive,” she said.

The Warriors were without starting center Kandis O’Donnell, who was out with a foot injury.

Warrior head man Frank Howell admitted he was not prepared for the Cougar defense, which included full-court pressure that forced a string of turnovers.

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“That’s my fault,” Howell admitted. “We didn’t prepare for that the way we should have, so that one is on me. Hopefully, next time we can do a better job with our preparation.”

Howell said he was impressed with Kennedy.

“I know what they are capable of doing,” he said. “We have three teams right now in our conference who are just a bit ahead of the rest of us. Kennedy is good enough to make a legitimate run at a state championship.”

Kennedy won the second half, 33-30, indicating that the game was over by halftime.

“We can flush the score,” Howell said. “We’ll have a chance to play Kennedy again. Every game is an opportunity to learn and grow and get better.”

Howell said he was forced to move Franklin inside due to O’Donnell’s ankle injury. That meant the 6-foot-1 Valparaiso University recruit was playing out of position.

“That made it more challenging to get Dani the types of touches that we were able to get her in the second half,” Howell said.

As if Kennedy’s inside game wasn’t enough, their perimeter players were almost as good. Meier hit four 3-pointers. Holmes, a point guard, had six assists and five steals.

“We knew we needed to stop Dani and Aleena and I think we did a good job, especially in the first half,” Meier said. “Our game plan was to get it into the post.”

Meier said the “snow day” did not negatively impact the game-day routine. “We came in and had a shoot-around an hour before we left (school) and I think that helped us a lot,” she said.

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Vis, now in his second season at Kennedy, posted a 15-8 record a year ago and likes his interchangeable post combination.

“Morgan and Steph are really, really good players,” Vis said. “A lot of teams have maybe one good post player, so if they don’t have that second one who can defend, we can move one outside and attack with the other down low. Both did an outstanding job tonight.”

KENNEDY (74): Madison Meier 4 2-2 14, Madison DeLong 0 0-0 0, Jordan Holmes 5 1-4 12, Mariah Vis 2 0-0 6, Maddison Hennessey 0 0-0 0, Carly Langhurst 0 0-0 0, Abigail Hellweg 0 0-0 0, Sydney Hayden 0 0-0 0, Sarah Ryder 0 0-0 0, Brinley Milbrath 3 0-1 6, Paige Hendrickson 2 0-2 5, Stephanie Botkin 6 4-6 16, Allison Nemecek 0 0-0 0, Morgan Martin 5 5-6 15, Katelyn Dye 0 0-0 0. Totals 27 12-21 74.

WASHINGTON (49): Joniqua Clark 2 2-3 6, Aleena Hobbs 4 8-11 17, Jasmyne Jones 0 0-0 0, Lilly Hartman 0 0-0 0, Courtney Squires, 0 0-0 0, Kiley Nelson 0 0-0 0, Kiki West-Doyle 0 0-0 0, Danielle Franklin 6 3-3 18, MJ Kamin 0 0-0 0, Sophie Ochs 1 0-0 2, Brittany Cullen 0 0-0 0, Anne Visser 2 0-0 6. Totals 15 12-18 49.

Halftime - Kennedy 41, Washington 19. 3-point shooting - Kennedy 8 (Meier 4, Vis 2, Holmes 1, Hendrickson 1), Washington 6 (Hobbs 1, Franklin 3, Visser 2).