

Jeff girls push No.6 Cougars to limit

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jefferson's Kiddie Corps nearly came of age Friday night.

The young Jefferson girls threw a scare into No.6 Kennedy before falling short, 43-39, in a Mississippi Valley Conference defensive tussle at Kennedy.

The J-Hawks outscored Kennedy, 28-18, in the second half and held the high-powered Cougars to just three field goals in the third and fourth quarters. And when Amanda Ollinger hit a 3-pointer to pull Jefferson within 37-36 with three minutes left, it look like the visiting team might ride the momentum to a monumental victory.

"I'm glad that we competed. That's the biggest thing," said Jefferson Coach Jason Edwards. "We came in at halftime and that's all we talked about: Sticking together and competing, and realizing that it's all for one and one for all.

"I think we definitely did that."

The Cougars, playing without flu-ridden point guard Jordan Holmes, found a way to beat Jefferson for the the 14th straight time, but it wasn't easy.

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Kennedy made only one field goal in the second quarter, one field goal in the third quarter and two field goals in the fourth quarter but still managed to raise its records to 8-1 overall and 6-1 in the league.

"It was a win," said Kennedy senior Morgan Martin, who had both of Kennedy's buckets in the fourth period. "We'd rather win ugly than lose pretty."

Martin made a three-point play with a strong inside move to give Kennedy a 40-36 edge with 2:11 left in the game.

Ollinger, facing extra defensive pressure all night, missed a driving shot and Madi Meier gave the Cougars a 41-36 lead with one free throw with 49 seconds to go.

Kieley Brathwaite saw her 3-pointer roll around the rim and fall out for Jefferson with 35 seconds remaining or it would have been a two-point contest. Sydney Hayden made one free for Kennedy with 28 seconds left for a 42-36 lead, Ollinger missed a 3-pointer and Paige Hendrickson hit a free throw for the Cougars with 10 seconds remaining to make it 43-36 and end the suspense.

Sam Kitterman hit a 3-pointer for Jefferson with two seconds left for the final score.

Kennedy made only 10 field goals all night, but the Cougars cashed 22 of 33 free throws to claim the victory. Jefferson (3-7, 2-5) made 12 field goals, but the J-Hawks were 10 of 13 at the foul line with fewer opportunities.

"I feel really good about the effort that we played with," said Ollinger. "We are young and they

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are experienced. That played a big factor. But I think at the end of the day, we did all that we could and worked hard. We worked our butts off."

Jefferson played without sophomore Erin Kuba, who was sidelined with a concussion.

Kennedy face-guarded Ollinger much of the night and used a diamond-and-one zone defense against her at times, with one Cougar chasing her all over the court while the rest of the Cougars played a zone defense. Kennedy also used a triangle-and-two at times to slow her down.

Ollinger finished with only 10 points, about half her average. She understands why teams give her extra attention, but doesn't like it.

"It's frustrating, because I don't really like to be the center of attention and be the focus," she said. "It's difficult for me to overcome it. The more experience I get, the more I'm figuring things out and how to beat the defenses."

Freshman Kennedy Dighton led Jefferson with 12 points. Maddie Blietz scored nine points for the J-Hawks.

Meier led Kennedy with 12 points.

Neither team shot well from the field. Kennedy made 10 of 41 shots for 24.4 percent and Jefferson was 12 of 43 for 27.9 percent.

JEFFERSON (39): Starks 0 0-0 0, Kitterman 2 0-0 6, Blietz 3 2-4 9, Veglahn 0 0-0 0, Guy 0 0-0 0, Brathwaite 0 0-0 0, Dahlen-Zeck 0 2-2 2, Dighton 4 3-3 12, Ollinger 3 3-4 10. Totals 12 10-13 39.

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KENNEDY (43): Meier 2 7-8 12, DeLong 0 0-0 0, Vis 0 0-0 0, Langhurst 0 2-2 2, Hellweg 0 0-0 0, Hayden 1 1-3 3, Milbrath 0 0-0 0, Hendrickson 2 4-6 8, Botkin 1 5-8 7, Martin 4 3-6 11.
Totals 10 22-33 43.

Halftime - Kennedy 25, Jefferson 11. 3-point goals - Jefferson 5 (Kitterman 2, Blietz 1, Dighton 1, Ollinger 1), Kennedy 1 (Meier 1).