

## Cougars scare No.1 Rams before falling

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kennedy Cougars threw a scare into top-ranked Dubuque Senior Friday night, but making them nervous was not the goal.

The goal was claiming a signature victory on their homecourt, so cutting a 16-point deficit to just six points in the fourth quarter was not good enough.

"No. It's a loss," said Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen after the Cougars fell short, 70-62. "It doesn't matter if it's 40 or six or eight or whatever."

Dubuque Senior (10-0, 6-0) features a college-size lineup of four college-bound athletes who stand 6-foot-9, 6-foot-9, 6-foot-7 and 6-foot-5, the same guys who defeated then No.1-Iowa City West this season and snapped the Trojans' 60-game winning streak.

Kennedy (8-2, 5-1) sacrificed several inches at nearly every spot on the floor, but the scrappy Cougars gave themselves a chance in the fourth quarter.

"We knew we had a chance coming in. Nobody else did," said McKowen. "And that's OK, though. We're not going to get hung up on what everybody else thinks of us until the end of the year."

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"This is definitely a step in the right direction," he said.

Kennedy hit some big 3-pointers on the comeback trail in the second half after falling behind 37-21 at intermission, but an overall 9 for 31 showing on 3-pointers foiled the upset bid.

Dubuque Senior made only one field goal in the fourth quarter as the Cougars stormed back into contention, but the Rams made 15 free throws in the final stanza and were 34 of 50 for the game at the free throw line.

Kennedy made more field goals than Dubuque Senior, 21-18, but the Rams outscored the Cougars 34-11 at the foul line.

"I think we did a pretty good job at times, but at other times we were a little out of control and we didn't play up to how we wanted to play," said Kennedy point guard A.J. Carter. "Sometimes we played the way they wanted us to play. We needed to speed them up and get them more spread out.

"We wanted to get in their heads early and let them know it was going to be a tough game."

Cole Murdock pulled the Cougars within 66-60 with a 3-pointer with 1:30 left, and then Derek Jacobus took a charge from Iowa-bound football player Travis LeGrand.

Murdock missed a long 3-pointer that would have made it a three-point game with 1:25 remaining, perhaps rushing an ill-advised shot in the heat of the moment.

Luke McDonnell, a 6-foot-9 junior who has committed to Northern Iowa, made a free throw with 1:23 left to make it 67-60 for the Rams. Carter and Murdock missed 3-pointers for Kennedy and McDonnell hit two foul shots with 1:03 left to make it 69-60.

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Murdock missed another 3-pointer and LeGrand hit a free throw for a 70-60 margin with 33 seconds left to seal the victory.

"It seemed like we were shooting free throws the whole second half and they were dropping in 3's, and we were throwing in some turnovers and all of a sudden you've got a ballgame," said Dubuque Senior Coach Wendell Eimers.

"They play awfully hard and they never quit," he said, praising the Cougars. "I thought a couple of times in the third quarter we could have broken it open and usually that's what we do. I give credit to Kennedy."

Kyle Haber, a 6-foot-7 point guard, led Dubuque Senior with 19 points and made some big plays to help his club despite getting into foul problems. He made only three field goals, but hit 13 of 17 free throws.

McDonnell made 9 of 14 free throws and scored 15 for the Rams. LeGrand went 6 for 9 at the foul line and scored 16 points. Seth Bonifas added 12 points for Dubuque Senior.

The Rams did not make a single 3-pointer all night, but they hurt the Cougars with an approximate 2-to-1 rebounding advantage and numerous points near the basket with their size.

Carter and Bryton Heisler led Kennedy with 11 points apiece. Murdock finished with 10 points, but struggled with his normally uncanny 3-point shooting. Zach Daniels hit two 3-pointers to begin the second half to point the Cougars in the right direction.

"It didn't surprise me that the game was a competitive game, because I knew we could do some things with our speed and our effort to try and get them spread out," said McKowen. "Our lulls were too long. You can't be a roller-coaster to win big games. We were a little bit of a roller-coaster tonight."

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"When things were going well, we were really, really good. And then when things went bad, it took us a long time to get out of it."

McKowen liked his club's defensive intensity and was happy with the overall shot selection. "Those are shots we've been hitting for weeks," he said. "Maybe we just sped ourselves up a little bit."

Kennedy outscored the No.1 team in the state, 41-33, in the second half.

"We came out pretty slow," said Jacobus, "but the second half we played like we should have played the whole game. I think if we make our free throws (11 of 18) and make our wide-open 3's we win the game."

DUBUQUE SENIOR (70): Hermesen 0 0-0 0, Noel 0 0-0 0, Hammel 0 0-0 0, Haber 3 13-17 19, Davis 1 6-8 8, McDonnell 3 9-14 15, Bonifas 6 0-2 12, LeGrand 5 6-9 16. Totals 18 34-50 70.

KENNEDY (62): Daniels 2 2-4 8, Carter 4 3-3 11, Jacobus 1 0-1 3, Bil 4 0-0 0, Murdock 3 1-2 10, Heisler 4 1-2 11, Holzer 1 0-0 2, Manning 2 2-2 6, Heitland 0 2-4 2. Totals 21 11-18 62.

Halftime - Dubuque Senior 37, Kennedy 21. 3-point goals - Dubuque Senior none, Kennedy 9 (Murdock 3, Daniels 2, Heisler 2, Jacobus 1, Bil 1). Fouled out - Daniels, Jacobus.