

Cougars aiming for No.1 Little Hawks

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kennedy Coach Tony Vis did not shudder when he realized the Cougars had drawn top-ranked Iowa City High in the opening round of the Class 5A girls state basketball tournament.

Quite the contrary. He welcomes the challenge.

Kennedy (16-7) will try to upset the Little Hawks (23-0) on Wednesday at 5 p.m. at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

"If you want to win the whole thing, I think you have to beat them eventually," said Vis. "And why not play them first when you have the most prep time for them?"

Iowa City High defeated the Cougars, 67-44, when they met during the regular season in the Mississippi Valley Conference at Kennedy Jan. 24. Vis knows it will take a supreme effort to reverse their fortunes in Des Moines.

"We have to shoot it well," he said. "We've had some nights where we haven't shot it well. And we're going to have to slow them down. It has to be more of a halfcourt game.

"They're the highest scoring 5A team for a reason. We've got to get back and make them run a halfcourt offense."

The Little Hawks are averaging 68.6 points with a three-star attack that features 6-foot-3 senior Haley Lorenzen (21.5 points), Courtney Joens (15.0) and Kiera Washpun (13.7). Lorenzen, the daughter of former Kennedy All-American Al Lorenzen, averages 9.4 rebounds and 3.5 blocks and is the likely choice for Miss Basketball this season.

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Kennedy was ranked in the top 10 much of the season, but the Cougars faded during the second part of the year and lost their last three games of the regular season. They upset No.10 Muscatine, 54-52, in the regional finals last Tuesday to make the state tournament.

"I thought we played pretty well," said Vis. "Muscatine had pushed City High really hard in early January (in a 53-48 loss), so we knew they were going to be a quality opponent.

"They had us on the ropes. We were down eight a couple of times in the first quarter. I thought we kept our poise and composure well and got stops when we needed them."

Vis said the Cougars did a good job of executing their game plan against Muscatine.

"The other thing was trying to get them back on the same page, build the chemistry stuff and just getting them to buy into what we're doing, to believe in one another, make the correct pass and be there to trust each other," he said.

Vis said his team is looking forward to facing Iowa City High again.

"I feel like they're refreshed," he said. "The thing that will be interesting to see, are we just happy to get there or are we there to do some damage?"

Kennedy features an experienced lineup with Morgan Martin (11.6 points per game), Paige Hendrickson (11.3), Stephanie Botkin (11.0), Madi Meier (7.3) and Jordan Holmes (7.2). Martin averages 8.7 rebounds and Botkin grabs 6.0 per game.

Hendrickson has 72 assists. Holmes has 64 assists and 57 steals.

Hendrickson scored 19 points against the Little Hawks in January and Botkin had 12. Washpun

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and Joens had 20 points apiece against the Cougars and Lorenzen had 18.

The Class 5A state tournament begins Wednesday with Waterloo West (21-2) facing Des Moines East (20-3) at 1:30 p.m. West Des Moines Valley (22-1) meets Southeast Polk (16-6) at 3:15.

Kennedy and Iowa City High follow at 5 p.m., with Waukee (20-3) and Dowling Catholic (20-3) meeting at 6:45 p.m.

The Kennedy/City High winner will play the Waukee/Dowling winner on Friday at 11:45 a.m. The finals are scheduled for Saturday at 8 p.m.