

## No. 9 Cougars wear down Hempstead

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Dubuque Hempstead is a run-and-gun team, but the Kennedy boys wore the Mustangs down to a frazzle Friday night.

Highly energized on both offense and defense right from the get-go, the vastly improving Cougars put up 43 first-half points and sprinted to a convincing 68-52 victory on their home court.

For Kennedy (14-5), ranked ninth in Class 4A, it was the fourth win in a row and ninth out of the last 11.

Hempstead (13-6), ranked as high as fifth just weeks ago, dropped its fifth straight after a nine-game winning streak.

“This was definitely a step in the right direction for us,” said fundamental-minded Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen three days after a sluggish effort against Cedar Rapids Jefferson. “We had two great practices. We may not have been quite as clean and crisp as in practice, but it was pretty close.”

A tenacious defense that simply ran the Mustangs ragged was the key, he said.

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“We’ve been scoring well since Christmas, and that hasn’t wavered,” McKowen pointed out.

“But our defense has been giving up a lot of points.

Tonight, we really clicked. We got some early steals that led to easy baskets.

“And I think we just wore them out.”

In a torrid-paced first quarter, the Cougars took a 19-16 lead with a 9-0 run on long 3-pointers from Zach Daniels and Cole Murdock and a conventional 3-point conversion from Brendon Manning.

They turned up the heat from there, capped by back-to-back 3-balls from the corner by fearless freshman Derrick Diggins to stretch the lead to 37-26 with two minutes left in the half.

“Our defense was just tremendous,” said the senior Manning, who led a balanced Kennedy attack with 17 points (and its only two free throws).

“We’re not the biggest team. But we did a good job boxing out on rebounds.

“And we really rotated on defense and contested all their shots. Then we pushed the ball up the court.”

McKowen effectively rotates an interchangeable eight players in and out of the lineup. They maintained pressure defense and up-tempo offense while the Mustangs sagged.

“Every one of our guys plays unselfishly,” the coach noted. “We have good balance because each of them is more interested in the team score than in individual scoring.”

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1. **Unlabeled Data:** The unlabeled data is used to train the model. It is a large dataset of images and their corresponding labels. The model is trained on this data to learn the features and patterns associated with each class.