

Kennedy girls headed back to state

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The fourth-ranked Kennedy girls soccer team is going back to the state tournament after rolling over Jefferson, 6-0, in a Class 3A regional final at Kingston Stadium on Monday.

The victory improves the Cougars to 15-3 and puts them into the state tournament for the sixth season in a row. They play West Des Moines Valley (14-4) Thursday at 8 p.m. at Muscatine.

“We are really fortunate to have a lot of talent in the area for whatever reason,” Kennedy Coach Homer Screws said. “Just being there before, it helps you with the nerves. You know what to expect once you get there and how things work, but it is just another game. You can’t put too much into it.”

The Cougars came out hot against Jefferson (8-11), dominating possession and creating scoring chances early against the J-Hawks defense.

It took senior Katie Helmlinger until the 16th minute to break the scoreless tie when she got the ball at the top of the box and fired it into the side netting.

“We really wanted to come out and have a good start to the game,” Helmlinger said. “There was a bit of a rivalry because we had lost to them earlier in the season, so we wanted to come out and prove ourselves.”

The game was still in question until late in the first half when junior Hannah Palomo hammered home a pair of goals just 63 seconds apart to put the Cougars up 3-0.

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In the second half, Kennedy netted three more goals. Senior Shauna Happel and freshmen Jordan Holmes and Emily Feltes scored.

Although the Cougars are fighting several minor injuries, Helmlinger said she believes they are hitting their stride as a team right now.

"I think we are in the groove right now, meshing as a team," Helmlinger said. "Hopefully that will help us in the state tournament."

Kennedy beat No. 5 West Des Moines Valley 1-0 in their only meeting of the year on May 20, and the Cougars are expecting a fight.

"We played our best game against them and got up 1-0," Screws said. "Our level of play in that game, if we can match that, it is going to be a good game. They have similar talent so to me it's like flipping a coin, whoever executes is going to come out with the win."

Kennedy 6, Jefferson 0

Goals -- Kennedy: Hatie Helmlinger (16th min), Hannah Palomo 2 (35th, 36th), Shauna Happel (42nd), Jordan Holmes (61st), Emily Feltes (74th).