

Fontana hopes Cougars learned their lesson

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 28 November 2011 22:18 - Last Updated Thursday, 01 December 2011 00:26



The Cedar Rapids Kennedy boys basketball team had a 17-4 record and was heavily favored to defeat Dubuque Hempstead in their substate ballgame last February.

The Cougars had skunked Hempstead, 77-60, just 10 days before that substate encounter, but many of the Kennedy players apparently got caught looking ahead.

The Mustangs stunned the Cougars, 58-54, ending Kennedy's season in disappointment and frustration. Coach Bob Fontana said he still thinks about that game. Hempstead had a losing record, yet spoiled Kennedy's campaign.

"You know what? It's always in the back of my mind," Fontana said. "Hopefully it will be a good teaching tool for the seniors this year, that you don't overlook anybody."

Kennedy defeated Cedar Falls in the final game of the regular season in Cedar Falls last season, tripping a top-10 team on the road, and Fontana was looking forward to the playoffs.

"Our postseason practices were not good at all," he said. "I gave them a few days off and I thought they'd come back hungry and ready to go, and all they kept talking about was playing Washington in the substate finals."

The Cougars didn't make it that far. Washington defeated Hempstead for the substate title and went to the state tournament. Kennedy stayed home.

"I always tell the kids, you have to be mature, responsible athletes," Fontana said, "and that's the greatest example of being immature and irresponsible."

Fontana hopes Cougars learned their lesson

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 28 November 2011 22:18 - Last Updated Thursday, 01 December 2011 00:26

Kennedy had a talented team last season. Five of those graduated seniors are playing basketball or football in college this year, so it was an opportunity lost.

Jake Manning, Jake Misener, Christian French, Kyle Lamaak, Herschel Dixon and Ross Ellsworth are gone now. All of them are college athletes except Lamaak, who had opportunities but chose to become a regular student at Northern Iowa.

"We didn't have any Division I basketball players, but we had athletes," Fontana said. "That allowed us to do what we did last year, other than stubbing our toes at the end of the season like we did."

The Cougars lost considerable talent from last year's top-10 club, but there's a new group of 12th graders that could give Kennedy another contender with Elliot Christians (6-7), Josiah Coleman (6-4), Cody Bell (6-4), Austin Rhoads (6-3), Josh Jahlas (6-2), Trevor Heitland (5-11), Alex Hayden (5-10) and Darius Fuller (5-8).

Coleman and Fuller are suspended for at least the first seven games for violating school policy.

"One of the things that sticks out about this group, I think the team chemistry will be really good," Fontana said. "They get along well, they like each other and they've always played well together."

Coleman averaged 10.1 points and 5.0 rebounds last season to lead the returning players. Fuller, Christians and Heitland also played regularly and appeared in all 22 games.

"We're going to have some areas that we really need to replace," said Fontana, starting his 15th year at Kennedy. "One of our big concerns is rebounding and getting more than a couple of guys being able to score."

Fontana anticipates having five seniors in the starting lineup, with the other seniors and juniors

Fontana hopes Cougars learned their lesson

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 28 November 2011 22:18 - Last Updated Thursday, 01 December 2011 00:26

providing depth.

"I think you'll see a team that hopefully gets better the further we go into the season," he said. "The seniors are going to have to carry the load for us early, until some juniors and possibly a sophomore get their feet wet."

Coleman has received Division I college scholarship offers from Wyoming, Coppin State and Texas San-Antonio, according to Fontana, but has not made a decision.

Manning (Wisconsin-Platteville) and Misener (Mount Mercy) are playing college basketball. French (Oregon), Ellsworth (Iowa Western) and Dixon (Tuskegee Institute in Alabama) are playing college football.