

Howell tops Edwards in battle of good buddies

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 21 December 2012 23:01

Jason Edwards enjoyed some great times as Frank Howell's sidekick for eight years with the Cedar Rapids Washington girls basketball program.

His seat on the opponent's bench Friday night wasn't nearly as much fun.

Edwards left the Warriors after last season to succeed Larry Niemeyer as the head coach at Jefferson, knowing full well he'd have to face Howell and the Warriors at least twice each year.

Howell and the 10th-ranked Warriors took Round 1 against their old buddy, 58-39, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game that does not count in the league standings.

The Warriors made five trips to the Class 4A state tournament while Edwards was on the coaching staff, including three trips to the championship game in 2005, 2006 and 2008. Now he's on the other side, although certainly not the enemy.

"The closer we got to it, the weirder I felt about the whole thing," said Howell. "I just wanted to get it over with.

"I want Jason to win every time he plays. We'll root for him every other time for the rest of his coaching career.

"It was kind of an awkward feeling," said Howell. "But I hope we have a chance to do this a lot of times down the road."

Jefferson (3-7) took an early 9-4 lead in the Washington gym, but the bigger, stronger Warriors grabbed a 25-19 advantage at intermission and dominated the second half.

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"I thought after that first half we were right there," said Edwards. "But that's what they do. They get runs and the next thing you know you're down double digits."

Howell used a variety of defenses against the J-Hawks. Edwards had seen it all before, but stopping it was another matter.

Howell did not take it easy on his former assistant, and Edwards did not expect him to. For 32 minutes Friday night, they were competitors chasing the same prize.

"He's like my big brother," said Edwards. "Our families are still close. It's hard, but you kind of get your head around it because it happens twice a year.

"It's going to happen twice a year for a long time to come, hopefully."

Abbie Herb had a big game for Washington as the Warriors (7-2) won for the seventh straight time. She finished with a game-high 14 points, six rebounds and six blocked shots.

Like many of the Washington players, Herb grew close to Edwards during their time together.

"It was weird, because he wasn't on our side of the court," she said. "But it was fun. I'm glad we got the win."

There were a lot of smiles in the handshake line after the game.

"He taught me a lot," said Herb. "But my favorite memory of him is the jokes he had. He could just make me laugh when I was mad or upset. He's just a great guy."

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Howell quickly went to bat for Edwards when Jefferson needed a new head coach. He did not wait for Jefferson officials to call him. He called them.

"To tell you the truth, I was proactive about it," he said. "Before anybody contacted me, I contacted them and told them that this is a 'must' hire.

"We continue to spend a lot of time around each other outside of basketball as well," said Howell. "It's freaking me out a little bit, because he can probably read me better than anybody else on the whole planet can. So it felt a little bizarre."

Washington led 38-26 after three quarters, then kept extending the margin until it reached 20 points at 53-33 on a basket by Maddie Kramer (11 points). The bulge grew to 23 points at 56-33 on a field goal by Aleena Hobbs, who finished with 13 points.

Howell was happy with the way his team played, especially in the second half.

"We held a team that can score some points below 40," he said. "I think we're getting better on the defensive end.

"I thought we used our length pretty well on both ends of the floor. We challenged some shots, got some blocks (eight) and deflections. And we started to run the floor really well in the second half, too."

Herb, a 6-foot senior, was a force at both end.

"She's passionate about the game. That's what I really enjoy the most, is how much she loves basketball," said Howell. "And she's versatile. We're fortunate to have her on our team."

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Dani Franklin grabbed 11 rebounds for Washington.

Taylor Jacobson led Jefferson (3-7) with 11 points.

JEFFERSON (39): Starks 0 0-0 0, Davidson 3 1-2 8, Blietz 0 0-0 0, Maas 0 0-0 0, Stromert 1 0-0 2, Jacobson 3 4-6 11, Broghammer 2 0-0 4, Brathwaite 1 0-0 3, Koolbeck 3 1-2 7, Ollinger 2 0-0 4. Totals 15 6-11 39.

WASHINGTON (58): Hobbs 6 1-2 13, Herb 6 1-1 14, Bjornsen 1 0-0 2, Glenski 1 0-0 2, Kramer 3 4-6 11, West-Doyle 0 0-0 0, Franklin 3 1-2 8, Kamin 0 0-0 0, Angellotti 0 0-0 0, Ochs 0 0-0 0, Cook 3 0-0 6, Jones 0 0-0 0, O'Donnell 1 0-0 2. Totals 24 7-11 58.

Halftime - Washington 25, Jefferson 19. 3-point goals - Jefferson 3 (Davidson 1, Jacobson 1, Brathwaite 1), Washington 3 (Herb 1, Kramer 1, Franklin 1).