

## Bardsley torches J-Hawks with 31

Written by Jim Ecker

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John Bardsley's right hand is a mess, with bubble wrap on the back of his hand and two fingers taped together to protect a broken bone.

It hasn't hurt his shot a bit.

Bardsley poured in a career-best 31 points off the bench Friday night to steer Kennedy past Jefferson, 80-73, in an entertaining Mississippi Valley Conference game at Jefferson.

Bardsley could not remember the last time he scored 31 points in a real game, at any level. "Playing out on the blacktop, playing against my old man," he guessed.

Bardsley broke the fifth metacarpal on his right hand in a freak accident in practice during the holiday break when his hand got caught in Zach Daniels' jersey during a drill. He missed eight games, but has come back with a vengeance.

In his three games since returning to action, the 6-foot-3 senior has scored 18 points against Hempstead, 18 against Linn-Mar and 31 against Jefferson for a 22.3 average. Prior to that, he was averaging eight points a game.

"He found out how quickly his season could be taken away from him when he had that freak injury," said Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen. "He's been a different person.

"He's been over-the-top coachable, in the fact that he's asking really good questions, not just for himself but for his teammates. And he's got a little bit different focus right now. That's just a senior knowing that the end is close, and he's going to get the most out of it.

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"We've brought him off the bench three games in a row, trying to ease him in, and he's not letting us ease him in," said McKowen. "He's taken full advantage. But great teammates. You can't score 23 in the second half if they don't find you."

Bardsley popped in a pair of 3-pointers and scored 10 points in the third quarter as the Cougars rallied from a 10-point deficit and grabbed a 56-52 edge heading into the final stanza, but he saved his best work for the last quarter.

Bardsley scored 11 straight points for the Cougars in the first 3 1/2 minutes of the fourth stanza with three straight rainbow 3-pointers from the corners and a pair of free throws as Kennedy took a 67-56 advantage.

"We know John well. We know he can shoot," said Jefferson Coach Stu Ordman. "Our player was a little slow to react on a couple of those 3-pointers. Then the guy gets happy and it's tough to put the clamps on him."

Bardsley quickly passed credit to his teammates.

"It was more of a team thing," he said. "Without them I wouldn't have been able to do what I did."

"The guards did a great job of getting me the ball when I started to warm up and they put it right in the shooting pocket, right where I needed it to be. And I was able to knock some shots down and get to the free throw line."

Bardsley had made only six 3-pointers all season, but he torched the J-Hawks with five from long distance.

Bardsley agreed with Coach McKowen about playing with a sense of urgency.

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"Definitely," he said. "This is the first time I've ever really had an injury like this for however long I've been playing. For it to happen senior year, I really started to take the game much more seriously. I don't take it for granted as I did before."

Bardsley tapes his right pinkie and ring finger together for support on his shooting hand, which looks awkward but obviously is not. "It's helped his shot," joked McKowen.

Bardsley has learned to play through the discomfort. "Once the adrenaline gets going I don't really notice it," he said.

Cole Murdock pitched in 18 points and A.J. Carter scored 14 for Kennedy (13-4, 9-3).

Tyler Konigsmark tossed in five 3-pointers and led Jefferson with 21 points. Jacob Olson and Brandon Wiederin netted 13 apiece and Jake Van Oort had 11 for the J-Hawks (5-12, 3-10).

KENNEDY (80): Daniels 1 1-2 4, Carter 7 0-3 14, Jacobus 1 0-0 3, Bil 0 0-0 0, Bardsley 8 10-13 31, Murdock 4 8-11 18, Buck 0 0-0 0, Heisler 0 0-0 0, Holzer 1 0-0 2, Manning 2 0-0 4, Heitland 2 0-0 4. Totals 26 19-29 80.

JEFFERSON (73): Cardis 3 2-3 8, Olson 5 3-5 13, Wiederin 5 2-3 13, J.VanOort 5 0-1 11, Colbert 0 0-0 0, Larson 1 0-0 2, A.VanOort 2 1-1 5, Konigsmark 7 2-2 21. Totals 28 10-15 73.

Halftime - Jefferson 41, Kennedy 31. 3-point goals - Kennedy 9 (Bardsley 5, Murdock 2, Daniels 1, Jacobus 1), Jefferson 7 (Konigsmark 5, Wiederin 1, J.VanOort 1). Fouled out - J.VanOort.