

J-Hawks snap 23-game MVC skid

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Jefferson J-Hawks didn't just break their 23-game losing streak in Mississippi Valley Conference games Friday night, they shattered it.

Dennis McKinney and Royshawn Webb scored 20 points apiece and Adam Van Oort added 15 points on his 18th birthday as the J-Hawks stopped the Washington Warriors, 76-62, at the Jefferson gym.

The J-Hawks lost all 16 of their MVC games last season and were 0-7 this year before playing well for 32 minutes against the Warriors.

Jefferson had come agonizingly close to winning a conference game this year, losing three straight times by a grand total of five points against Dubuque Senior, Cedar Falls and Kennedy, but Friday was finally their night.

"We could just tell we were getting closer and we were just waiting to put it together and sustain every punch that everybody throws at us," said coach Brandon Horman, in his second year at the helm. "This week we have."

The J-Hawks (5-9) rolled to a big non-conference win against Davenport Central Tuesday

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before the big breakthrough against Washington.

Horman said his players have worked hard all season, maintained a positive attitude and kept improving. "I'm very proud, very happy with that," he remarked.

Webb, a 6-foot-1 point guard, displayed some fearless moves to the basket and led his club from start to finish.

"It feels good," he said. "We've been working hard in practice and that hard work finally paid off.

"I think we've picked up our intensity," said Webb, explaining the team's improvement. "We've brought more energy to the table than we have in a long time and I feel we're a better rebounding team than we used to be.

"I feel like we can only go up from here, as long as we keep working hard in practice."

McKinney, a 6-foot-4 senior, brought a ton of that intensity and finished with eight rebounds, sharing the team lead with Van Oort. McKinney was relentless near the hoop and helped keep Washington star Laveechie Williams under wraps.

Williams was averaging a double-double coming into the game, but he was held to seven points and seven rebounds and was ejected after drawing his second technical foul for hanging on the rim. Williams will have to serve a mandatory one-game suspension for being ejected, according to Washington athletic director Paul James.

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McKinney moved to Cedar Rapids from the south side of Chicago during the summer of 2014. He played varsity basketball at his previous school as a freshman and sophomore, but he spent all of his last year at Jefferson on the junior varsity and dressed for only two varsity games.

"It was kind of a letdown that I didn't play varsity last year, but I didn't let that get to me," said McKinney. "I kept pushing and pushing, because I knew my time would come."

McKinney also got a technical foul Friday, which he said he regrets. "I try to bring emotion to the game, in a good way," he said, "and not try to hurt my team by getting a technical."

Horman said McKinney has been a good addition to the program. "Since he's been here, he's been team-first," the coach remarked.

McKinney said he moved from Chicago to Cedar Rapids with his aunt as "Just a safety thing. She wanted to come to a safer environment where I would get better as a person."

McKinney said his father and step-mother also live in Cedar Rapids.

Keion Wills led Washington (5-7) with 21 points. Hunter Strait added 17 points for the Warriors.

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WASHINGTON (62): Wills 5 9-12 21, Strait 7 2-5 17, Hobbs 1 2-2 4, Thomas 3 2-4 9, Williams 2 3-5 7, Jackson 1 0-0 2, Dawson 0 0-0 0, Beard 0 0-0 0.
Totals 19 20-30 62.

JEFFERSON (76): Webb 4 12-12 20, Green 1 0-5 2, Kramer 1 2-4 6, Van Oort 6 2-3 15, McKinney 8 4-4 20, Brown 4 0-0 8, Wiederin 0 0-0 0, Larsen 2 0-0 5.
Totals 26 21-28.

Halftime - Jefferson 35, Washington 23. 3-point goals - Washingt 4 (Wills 2, Strait 1, Thomas 1), Jefferson 3 (Kramer 1, Van Oort 1, Larsen 1).