

## **J-Hawks push No. 1 Rams before falling**

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 23 November 2012 23:12

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Nobody can accuse Jason Edwards of ducking the best competition he can find.

In his first game as the new girls basketball coach at Jefferson High School, Edwards accepted the challenge of playing top-ranked Southeast Polk because he wanted to see where the J-Hawks stand in their development.

The J-Hawks measured up fairly well.

Jefferson gave Southeast Polk a good battle for more than three quarters Friday night before falling short, 74-47, in the season opener at Jefferson.

The J-Hawks trailed by eight points, 51-43, with 5:55 left in the game and trailed by 14 points, 61-47, with 2:15 remaining. The Rams finished the game with a 13-0 run to make it look like a blowout, but it wasn't.

Southeast Polk Coach Tracy Dailey was impressed with Jefferson.

"They played hard," she said. "They played harder than us for three quarters and two minutes. I give them 100 percent credit.

"They wanted to beat us and you could tell."

Southeast Polk finished 24-2 last season and reached the semifinals of the Class 4A state tournament. The Rams were ranked No. 1 in the Class 5A preseason poll this year and have a talented team, led by Drake recruit Caitlin Ingle.

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Edwards succeeded Larry Niemeyer as Jefferson's head coach this season. He wants to build on Neimeyer's success and thought playing Southeast Polk would be a good way to get started.

"Our athletic director (Chris Deam) did ask if we wanted to play Southeast Polk. And I said, 'Yes, absolutely,'" Edwards related.

"When you have an opportunity to play a quality opponent like Southeast Polk, I'm not going to say no. It think it allows those girls to see how they measure up against the best talent in the state."

Niemeyer's final season was riddled by injuries, but the J-Hawks are healthy now and battled the Rams on nearly even terms for most of the first half. A rainbow 3-pointer by Kaitlin Davidson pulled Jefferson within 27-26 with 2:30 left in the second quarter, but Southeast Polk finished the first half with an 8-0 run for a 35-26 advantage at intermission.

It was still an eight-point game at 51-43 with 5:55 left on two free throws by Maddie Koolbeck, but Southeast Polk gradually pulled away and put an exclamation point on the victory at the end.

For three quarters, it was hard to tell which team was ranked No. 1 in the state and which team was installing a brand-new system with a new head coach.

"I thought we did really well, with our new offense and everything and a new coach," said Davidson, who hit four 3-pointers and led the J-Hawks with 15 points. "I thought we did a good job. We're really upbeat."

Taylor Jacobson scored 13 points for Jefferson in the first half, but Southeast Polk held her to just one point in the second half and she finished with 14.

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Jessica Gardner paced Southeast Polk with 17 points. Ingle finished with 16 points and Megan Bianchi scored 12.

Jefferson hurt itself with 28 turnovers, but the J-Hawks showed a lot of energy, used several defenses and kept attacking.

"Overall, I think it's a good start," Edwards said. "It's good to know what we need to work on next.

"Great atmosphere," he said. "It was scheduled for Black Friday and there was a lot going on. I thought there was a lot of good energy in the gym and people got a chance to watch.

"Hopefully we put on a good show for them. We played hard and we'll just get better from there."

Jefferson visits Bettendorf Saturday night.

SOUTHEAST POLK (74): Bianchi 6 0-0 12, Donels 4 0-2 9, Ingle 6 2-3 16, Gardner 7 2-3 17, Annie Penquite 3 0-0 7, Huinker 1 1-2 3, Veach 0 0-0 0, Taylor 0 0-0 0, Bricker 2 0-0 4, Cole 2 0-0 4, Abby Penquite 1 0-0 2, Veigulis 0 0-0 0, Ira 0 0-0 0. Totals 32 5-10 74.

JEFFERSON (47): Davidson 4 3-4 15, Stromert 1 4-7 6, Jacobson 5 3-6 14, Broghammer 1 0-0 2, Koolbeck 1 3-4 5, Starks 0 0-0 0, Beastrom 0 0-0 0, Blietz 0 3-4 3, Brathwaite 0 0-0 0, Starr 0 0-0 0, Ollinger 1 0-0 2, Maas 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 16-26 47.

Halftime - Southeast Polk 35, Jefferson 26. 3-point goals - Southeast Polk 5 (Ingle 2, Donels 1, Gardner 1, Annie Penquite 1), Jefferson 5 (Davidson 4, Jacobson 1).