

Cougars dazzle Jefferson at both ends

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 05 January 2013 00:42 -

Magnificent. Terrific. Outstanding.

If you'd like to know how the Kennedy boys basketball team played against Jefferson for the first 15 minutes Friday night, those three words do the trick.

The Cougars raced to a 32-8 lead with less than two minutes left in the first half and cruised to a 48-36 victory over the J-Hawks in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Jefferson.

Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana said his team cannot play any better than it did for nearly the entire first half.

"And that's what we're going to focus on," he said. "Take that 15 minutes and build it into 20 minutes. And then hopefully keep improving."

Kennedy scored 19 straight points during an impressive stretch that began midway through the first quarter and did not stop until midway through the second period. The Cougars did everything right and the J-Hawks did everything wrong.

"If we play like that, we can do anything (this season)," said 6-foot-5 senior Ben Struss, a key element in the victory. "We've got to keep it going."

If you saw the Cougars struggle in a 53-50 loss to Washington before the holidays, you wouldn't have recognized the club that blitzed Jefferson Friday night.

Kennedy (5-2, 3-1) used a suffocating matchup zone defense that gave Jefferson star Jacob Olson absolutely no room to breathe. And on offense, the Cougars looked crisp and sharp in the first half.

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"Over the break we practiced hard and it showed in the game tonight," said Kennedy point guard Anthony Carter, who helped lead the onslaught on both ends of the floor. "We just played with more intensity."

Olson began the game as the No.1 scorer in the Mississippi Valley Conference at 18.6 per game, but the 5-foot-10 junior managed only five points against Kennedy, all in the final 83 seconds of the second quarter to make it 32-13 at intermission.

Olson had Cougars in his face all night.

"Run him off the 3-point line and when he went to penetrate, just double-team and trap him and don't let him go," said Carter, explaining the game plan.

Kennedy led 39-20 after three quarters and was never threatened by the J-Hawks (6-3, 3-2).

Ky Kramer got hot in the second half and finished with 16 points for Jefferson. Creighton Robinson, the other member of Jefferson's three-man band, scored eight points.

Olson, Kramer and Robinson were averaging 44.3 points when the game began and finished with 29 against the Cougars. Kramer accounted for 13 of those 29 points in the second half.

"We knew they had three good scorers from the perimeter and the other guys we weren't too worried about," said Struss. "We were trying to make it as hard as possible on them."

Robinson hit a 3-pointer to give Jefferson a 5-4 lead with about six minutes left in the first quarter. Little did anyone know what was about to happen for Kennedy - and not happen for Jefferson.

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Blake Murdock hit back-to-back baskets for the Cougars to start the surge, then Carter scored twice for Kennedy and it was 12-5.

Johnathan Koelling tallied to make it 14-5, and then the Cougars really turned on the juice as Patrick Martin, Carter and Struss drilled three straight 3-pointers to make it 23-5 and finish the 19-0 surge that lasted more than eight minutes.

"You know what the big thing was?," said Fontana. "We not only executed the game plan, we understood about quality possessions at the offensive end."

Struss led the balanced attack with 12 points. Carter finished with 11 markers and Murdock scored 10 points.

The scoreboard said it was a 12-point game at the end, but the final margin does not do justice to the onslaught.

"We didn't match Kennedy's energy," said Jefferson Coach Stu Ordman. "And we have to learn how to practice. Today we played how we practiced."

"Their combination of height and strength gave us a lot of trouble."

KENNEDY (48): B.Murdock 3 3-4 10, Carter 5 0-0 11, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Bardsley 1 0-0 2, C.Murdock 1 2-2 4, Martin 1 0-0 3, Koelling 1 0-0 2, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Holzer 2 0-0 4, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Struss 5 1-3 12. Totals 19 6-9 48.

JEFFERSON (36): Olson 2 0-0 5, Robinson 3 0-0 8, Kramer 6 1-1 16, Van Oort 1 0-0 3, Wiederin 0 0-0 0, Colbert 0 0-0 0, Larson 1 1-3 3, Sullivan 0 1-2 1, Floyd 0 0-0 0, Jenkins 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 3-6 36.

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Halftime - Kennedy 32, Jefferson 13. 3-point goals - Kennedy 4 (B.Murdock 1, Carter 1, C.Murdock 1, Struss 1), Jefferson 7 (Kramer 3, Robinson 2, Olson 1, Van Oort 1). Fouled out - Sullivan.