

Koelling lifts Cougars by Saints, 44-41

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 08 January 2013 23:31 -

Ryan Luehrsmann did not know a whole lot about Kennedy senior Johnathon Koelling prior to Tuesday night's basketball game at Kennedy.

He does now.

Koelling collected a double-double with 22 points and 11 rebounds as the Cougars trimmed Xavier, 44-41, in a Mississippi Valley Conference affair.

Koelling, a streaky 6-foot-4 forward, posted a career high in points and rebounds against the Saints despite not starting.

"He was kind of a wild card tonight," said Luehrsmann, Xavier's rookie head coach.

Koelling has enjoyed big games this season against Burlington (19 points, 10 rebounds) and Waterloo West (16 points, 9 rebounds), but he did not score in an upset loss to Washington and had only two points in a victory over Jefferson last Friday.

Koelling was averaging 8.7 points and 5.9 rebounds prior to Tuesday's explosion against the Saints. "I really wanted to beat them," he said.

Koelling said he was looking forward to facing Xavier center Matt Nelson, a 6-foot-8 junior who finished with 10 points.

"I thought it was going to be a big challenge, so I focused and got ready to go this week," he said. "I was ready to beat Xavier."

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Koelling has started most of the games for Kennedy but said part of the strategy Tuesday was to see if Austin Holzer and Drew Heitland, a pair of burly football players, might be able to lean into Nelson and get him tired. Then Koelling would pop into the game and run the court for points.

"That's what we did," he said. "That was the game plan and we followed it."

Koelling pumped in 14 points in the first half to help Kennedy take a 22-18 lead at intermission. He was quieter in the second half, but hit two key free throws with 14.7 seconds left to give the Cougars a 43-38 advantage.

"He's a very athletic kid and he ran the floor really well tonight," said Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana. "I thought he went to the boards well."

"His two free throws at the end were big. They were really big. And I thought he held his own in there against Nelson."

Fontana thought Holzer and Heitland also did a good job against Nelson near the basket.

Koelling said he needs to become more consistent for the Cougars, instead of running hot and cold.

"I have to practice hard every day and come out ready to go," he said. "I have to use my mind. I have to think about it more."

"Sometimes I'm losing focus in practice and throughout the games."

Koelling scored half of Kennedy's 44 points. Blake Murdock some big plays and finished with

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nine points for the Cougars (6-2, 4-1).

Trey Sampson hit four 3-pointers and scored 16 points for Xavier (6-4, 2-3).

It's been hard to determine who has the top team in the Metro this year. Fontana thinks Linn-Mar and Prairie have the best talent, but both of those clubs have losing records. Kennedy, Jefferson and Xavier have played well at times, but not always.

Who has the best team?

"Boy, I don't know," said Luehrsmann. "I think Kennedy might be that team right now."

XAVIER (41): Winker 1 0-0 2, Sampson 5 2-3 16, McDermott 0 4-4 4, Nelson 5 0-0 10, Woods 3 0-0 7, Schulte 1 0-0 2, Thinnes 0 0-0 0. Totals 15 6-7 41.

KENNEDY (44): B.Murdock 3 3-4 9, Carter 1 0-0 2, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Bardsley 0 0-0 0, Martin 0 0-0 0, Koelling 8 6-7 22, Buck 0 0-0 0, Holzer 2 0-0 4, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Struss 3 0-0 7. Totals 17 9-11 44.

Halftime - Kennedy 22, Xavier 18. 3-point goals - Xavier 5 (Sampson 4, Woods 1), Kennedy 1 (Struss 1).