

Fontana nets 300th as Cougars belt J-Hawks

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 01 February 2013 23:46 -

Bob Fontana's basketball office at Kennedy High School is located just beyond a row of toilets in a corner of the boys locker room.

Now that he's won 300 games, maybe the school will give him fancier digs.

Fontana reached the milestone Friday night as the Cougars stuffed Jefferson, 47-32, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Kennedy.

Fontana, 53, has compiled a 300-196 record in 22 years as a head coach, including a 227-126 mark in 16 years at Kennedy.

He became a head coach when he was only 23 years old, fresh out of college. His first two jobs were at CWL (Corwith) and Carlisle, two small schools that had been struggling when he arrived.

Now he's joined the 300 Win Club among Iowa high school coaches.

"It's nice," he said, "and I guess personally the one thing I would say is I didn't take any shortcuts. The first two jobs I had, both programs had been way down and hadn't had winning seasons in over seven or eight years.

"So I cut my teeth at those two places. I was willing to pay my dues."

Fontana lost the first game he coached at CWL by nine points. It was a victory of sorts, but not to him.

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"Everybody was celebrating and I said, 'What the heck? We got beat,' and they said, 'Yeah, that team beat us by 46 last year.'"

A few days later, Fontana got his first win at CWL in a conference game on the road. "We got back to town and they had the firetruck out and all that stuff," he said. "So I remember that very well."

Fontana had been stuck on 299 wins for three games as the Cougars lost to Iowa City West, Dubuque Hempstead and Linn-Mar. They got off to a slow start Friday and trailed Jefferson, 21-14, midway through the second quarter before taking control.

Fontana changed his lineup and adjusted his defense, giving the J-Hawks (9-8, 6-6) almost no room to breathe for the remainder of the night. "From that point on," he noted, "they scored 11 points the rest of the game."

Kennedy finished the first half with a 14-3 spurt to grab a 28-24 lead at intermission, but the Cougars were just getting started. They held Jefferson to two points in the third quarter while building a 39-26 advantage.

Kennedy outscored Jefferson, 25-5, during a 14-minute stretch from early in the second quarter to the end of the third quarter.

Jefferson guard Jacob Olson, one of the leading scorers in the Mississippi Valley Conference with a 16-point average, scored two points Friday and was never a factor. Olson scored only five points when the J-Hawks lost to Kennedy earlier in the season at Jefferson, 48-36, so he averaged 3.5 points against the Cougars this year.

Kennedy used man-to-man and zone defenses against Jefferson, keeping a watchful eye on Olson the entire night. The plan worked perfectly as Anthony Carter and the rest of Kennedy's guards gave Olson little room to maneuver.

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"Keep him in front of us, don't go for his hesitation moves, don't let him get into the lane, and make him take a tough shot," said Carter, describing the keys to success.

Carter combined solid offense with his air-tight defense and led Kennedy with 12 points. Johnathon Koelling contributed 11 points off the bench.

Ky Kramer scored 17 points for Jefferson, personally accounting for more than half the offense. Layne Sullivan added 10 points. The J-Hawks scored eight points in the second half.

The Cougars knew Fontana was sitting at 299 victories and wanted to help him reach the 300-win milestone against Jefferson.

"It's a big rivalry game, and we knew it was Coach's 300th," said Carter. "We've been trying to get it for him."

Carter, a junior, said he enjoys playing for Fontana. "He's hard on us, but we know it's just because he cares," he said.

Fontana served as the sophomore basketball coach at Des Moines Lincoln and West Des Moines Valley after beginning his career at CWL. He then coached at Carlisle before coming to Kennedy 16 years ago.

"I thank the administration for hiring me and letting me establish a culture the way I thought it needed to be established," he said. "It's been a nice ride here."

Fontana has won four MVC titles and taken the Cougars to three state tournaments. He'd like to keep coaching for a long time.

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"I'm 53, so I'm hoping I do it until somewhere between 65 and 70," he said. "I enjoy doing it."

JEFFERSON (32): Olson 1 0-0 2, Robinson 0 0-0 0, Kramer 6 3-4 17, Van Oort 1 0-0 3, Wiederin 0 0-0 0, Larson 0 0-0 0, Sullivan 4 2-2 10, Jenkins 0 0-0 0. Totals 12 5-6 32.

KENNEDY (47): Murdock 3 0-0 7, Carter 5 0-0 12, Bardsley 0 0-0 0, Buck 0 0-0 0, Martin 2 2-2 6, Koelling 4 3-4 11, Holzer 1 0-0 2, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Struss 3 0-0 7, Jacobus 1 0-0 2. Totals 19 5-6 47.

Halftime - Kennedy 28, Jefferson 24. 3-point goals - Jefferson 3 (Kramer 2, Van Oort 1), Kennedy 4 (Carter 2, Murdock 1, Struss 1).