

No.2 Bettendorf stops Cougars

Written by Clete Campbell

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BETTENDORF – They remarkably went from winless to reaching the show in 30 days. Chia Pets don't mature this fast.

But the true test of how far the Kennedy Cougars have come in their late autumn surge from an 0-6 club to a playoff team came Monday night.

And as far as the Cougars have come over the last month and as far as they traveled in a marvelous first-half performance at TouVelle Stadium Monday, they couldn't overcome second-ranked Bettendorf on its home turf in this daunting Class 4A playoff exam.

Bettendorf won, 31-7

Continuing to look like one of the teams to beat for the 4A state championship, unbeaten Bettendorf again rode its powerful defense to victory. Iowa sack leader Jack Kallenberger fronted a Bulldogs defense that limited Kennedy to a single touchdown.

Bettendorf quarterback Cyle Cox produced 247 offensive yards – including 116 rushing yards –

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and a touchdown pass, and tailback Justice O'Conner added a hat trick of rushing touchdowns in a decisive triumph in the second round of the playoffs.

Bettendorf (11-0) will host North Scott in the quarterfinals Friday night.

“(Defense) is what it's about in the playoffs,” Bettendorf Coach Aaron Wiley said.

Seeking their second consecutive quarterfinal berth, the Cougars (who closed 3-8) ran into a Bettendorf team that was determined to avoid an upset against the visitors from Cedar Rapids.

Five days after rolling up 467 yards and 27 first downs in a 20-17 first-round victory over Muscatine, Kennedy's offense could not get out of first gear. Bettendorf had Kennedy running backs running in quick sand and had quarterback Sammy Lizarraga laboring to locate open targets.

Cougars tailback Tyler Dralle, who was a 234-yard power machine in Kennedy's first-round upset of Muscatine, could not get anything going against Bettendorf's stonewall defense. As a team, Kennedy labored to go anywhere in the second half, where it netted just 46 yards.

“You don't get any style points with this stuff,” Wiley said. “You find a way to win. I thought our defense was outstanding, and that's how you win games in the playoffs.”

Matching their mighty foe, the Cougars' defense came out aggressively and making plays. Kennedy forced Cox and Bettendorf to go 3-and-out on their first possession. The Kennedy defense's first moment of truth came when it pushed Cox and Company to 4th-and-1 from the Kennedy 44-yard line late in the first quarter. Cox answered the bell, going nine yards to the Cougar 35 for a drive-saving first down.

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On the very next play, Cox located big play receiver Austin Cullor for a 35-yard touchdown as Bettendorf scored first blood with 3:16 left in the opening quarter.

Needing an equalizing answer, the Cougars could not find it, going three and out on their ensuing possession. But the Kennedy defense again answered the call, defusing Bettendorf's drive to close the quarter and keep Kennedy within 7-0 heading to the second quarter.

The Cougars' offense finally came to life in the second quarter with Lizarraga driving them deep into the Bettendorf red zone for a 1st and goal chance. Lizarraga, deftly reading the Bulldogs' goal line defense, found Shaun Beyer for a 6-yard touchdown pass that tied the game at 7-7.

Meanwhile, the Bulldogs were playing butterfinger football. Bettendorf fumbled the ensuing kickoff, leaving Bettendorf with a super long field at its own 10. The Cougars' defense again answered the bell, forcing the Bulldogs into their third three-and-out of the night.

But Keegan Glaus hijacked a Lizarraga pass to open Kennedy's next drive and keep Bettendorf even. The Cougars got a break as Bettendorf kicker Matt Perk's playoff struggles continued. Perk was undone by a bad snap on a field goal attempt on the Bulldogs' next drive.

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