

No.9 Cougars roll by Tigers

Written by Jim Ecker
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Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen has preached to his team all year about the importance of playing their best basketball at the end of the season when it really counts.

The Cougars are getting pretty darn close.

Kennedy rode two different 13-0 streaks Friday night to an impressive 71-55 conquest of Cedar Falls in the Class 4A substate semifinals at Kennedy.

Now comes the showdown that Metro fans have craved with the ninth-ranked Cougars (17-5) facing the sixth-ranked Linn-Mar Lions (18-4) in the substate finals Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the U.S. Cellular Center for a berth in the state tournament.

Cole Murdock and Zach Daniels picked Cedar Falls apart with their sharp passing Friday night, the Cougars attacked the backboards with reckless abandon and Brendon Manning got the place jumping with a rebound dunk with the game just 20 seconds old.

"We had an amazing week of practice and it showed tonight," said McKowen. "It wasn't a perfect game, but I don't know if you can ever play a perfect game. But we played long stretches of really good basketball."

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"We're pretty excited about the way we're playing right now," he said. "I feel like we're firing on all cylinders."

The Cougars will have to keep firing Tuesday night when they face arch-rival Linn-Mar, which handed them a 74-61 licking Jan. 6 at Kennedy. The Lions are playing at a high level as well after bopping Waterloo West, 66-45, in the substate semifinals.

"It's going to take a night like tonight where we do our stuff really well," said McKowen. "We want to take away a few of their things, but we don't get caught up too much in the other team. We really have to do our stuff well."

The Cougars did their stuff really well against Cedar Falls, starting with that stuff by Manning with fans still settling into their seats. He collected an offensive rebound and slammed it home, getting himself and his teammates fired up.

"It's always good to get a dunk. It kind of gets the team going," said Manning, who finished with 20 points despite foul trouble. "I think at the start of the game it boosted our confidence and got us going."

The game was tied 18-18 when Kennedy went on its first 13-0 spurt for a 31-18 lead. Cedar Falls scored the next four points, but the Cougars took off on another 13-0 surge for a 44-22 bulge. All told, it was an impressive 26-4 stretch that spanned the halves.

