

Cold Cougars fall to PV at state

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - You could sense the Kennedy Cougars might be in trouble at the state basketball tournament Wednesday night when Pleasant Valley put an imposing starting lineup on the floor that stood 6-foot-7, 6-foot-6, 6-foot-6 and 6-foot-5.

All four of those Spartans were taller than Kennedy's tallest starter.

You also could sense the Cougars might be in trouble when they kept clanking their 3-pointers on their way to a dreadful 3-for-20 performance from long range.

The Cougars managed to overcome a 12-point deficit and take a 44-42 lead on a rare 3-pointer with 4:14 left in the game on the strength of an impressive 18-4 run, but the fun ended there.

Pleasant Valley marched to the foul line and hit 14 straight free throws in the final 3 minutes, 22 seconds and defeated Kennedy, 58-51, in the opening round of the Class 4A tournament at Wells Fargo Arena.

The Spartans, who began the season with 19 straight victories, will face Des Moines Hoover in the semifinals Friday afternoon. The Cougars retired for the season with an 18-6 mark, losing in the first round of the state tournament for the second straight under second-year head coach Jon McKowen.

"When we're smaller across the front line, we've got to shoot it a little bit, especially when

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they're a pack-man team," said McKowen. "They really want to pack it in tight (on defense).

"We knew we were going to get good shots. I thought we were going to shoot it a little better. It didn't happen."

Kennedy had made 38.1 percent of its 3-pointers heading into the state tournament, but the Cougars made only 15 percent against Pleasant Valley.

Zach Daniels, who hit 61 triples this season, was 0-for-6. Cole Murdock, who had 44 triples, was 1-for-7 as Kennedy's starting guards struggled all night. Daniels, averaging 12.9 points, went scoreless.



"There hasn't been a night that we've gone 3-for-20 this year or shot that low a percentage," said McKowen. "That's one of our offensive weapons that we like to utilize: Spread them out and knock down shots. To their credit, they took us out of rhythm in the first half."

Bryton Heisler scored 22 points for Kennedy and played himself to exhaustion. Brendon Manning collected 11 points and 11 rebounds, but the offensive production tapered off quickly from there.

Heisler looked completely gassed when he took a two-minute breather at the start of the fourth quarter after fueling Kennedy's comeback from a 38-26 deficit, but he popped back up and got back in the game. He had to leave the floor for a few seconds again later in the fourth quarter when he tweaked a sprained ankle, but came right back in.

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"I was pretty tired, but I knew that it could be our last game so I just decided to give it all I had," said Heisler, a 6-foot-2 senior who scored on a series of strong drives. "They weren't really able to stop me and our shots weren't falling, so I just decided to take it."

Carter Milam, a 6-foot-7 mountain of a man, hurt Kennedy inside with 17 points on 8-for-9 shooting on layups. Will Carius, who stands 6-foot-6, led Pleasant Valley with 18 points. Jeffrey Kardell, who is 6-foot-5, hit 9-of-10 clutch free throws and added 14 points for the Spartans.

Pleasant Valley was too big and too talented for Kennedy on this night.

"We knew that was going to be a problem coming in, as far as offensive rebounds and rebounds for them," said Murdock.

Kennedy had 6-footers trying to guard people who were a foot taller. "They had four really good post players," said McKowen. "For all five of our guys to have to guard posts every possession, it makes it really difficult."

Pleasant Valley scored 10 straight points for a 38-26 lead midway through the third period and Kennedy appeared to be in serious trouble, but Heisler hit a 3-pointer from the top of the key and suddenly the Cougars caught life.

"It's really hard to come back when you're down 10 to 15 points," said Manning. "But we kind of found some energy and came back."

Heisler pulled the Cougars within 42-41 with a driving layup, then Murdock hit his only 3-pointer for a 44-42 edge with 4:14 left in the game as Kennedy's defensive pressure wore into the Spartans. Pleasant Valley regrouped, however, and began to assert itself all over again before parading to the foul line.

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"I thought we'd be able to ride that run a little bit longer," said McKowen. "But it just happened the game got slowed back down."

Heisler gave Kennedy its last lead at 45-44 with a free throw with 2:56 remaining. Pleasant Valley took a 48-45 lead, but Heisler pulled the Cougars within 48-47 with 2:01 left.

Milam hit a follow shot to the Spartans a 50-47 lead with 1:08 remaining. As it turned out, that was Pleasant Valley's only field goal in the fourth quarter. All 14 of its other points in the final stanza came at the foul line.

Murdock missed a 3-pointer in the final minute that would have tied the game and Manning could not connect with the offensive rebound. Pleasant Valley made eight straight free throws in the final 39.1 seconds to ice the victory, although the Cougars kept scratching until the very end.

Pleasant Valley Coach Steve Hillman was happy with the way his guards handled Kennedy's swarming defense, for the most part.

"That's an aggressive defense, it's kind of funky," he said of Kennedy's sliding zones and traps. "We haven't seen that all year long. I think if don't have a week to prepare for it, we're really in trouble. It really helped to have that prep time. I can see why they give people fits."

Pleasant Valley (22-2) will face Des Moines Hoover (22-1) in the semifinals Friday afternoon. Iowa City West (24-0) will meet North Scott (21-3) in the other semifinal.

KENNEDY (51): Daniels 0 0-0 0, Heisler 9 3-5 22, Murdock 3 0-0 7, Diggins 1 0-0 3, Manning 4 3-3 11, Odom 0 0-0 0, Gardner 2 0-0 4, Bisenius 0 0-0 0, Techau 0 0-0 0, Brewster 1 2-2 4, Girling 0 0-0 0, Hall 0 0-0 0, Wall 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 8-10 51.

PLEASANT VALLEY (58): Kipper 1 2-2 5, Carius 6 6-8 18, Kardell 2 9-10 14, Czamecki 20-0

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4, Milam 8 1-2 17, Dippel 0 0-0 0, Cronk 0 0-0 0, Stewart 0 0-0 0,
Carroll 0 0-0 0, Fields 0 0-0 0, Mickle 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 18-22
58.

Halftime - Pleasant Valley 28, Kennedy 24. 3-point goals - Kennedy 3 (Heisler 1, Murdock 1, Diggins 1), Pleasant Valley 2 (Kipper 1, Kardell 1).