

Knock has Kennedy blood in his veins

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kyle Knock is not much of a dancer.

The Kennedy High School football team dances the Hokey Pokey in the locker room after victories, but maybe his heart's not into it.

Knock, 36, played football at Kennedy and is now the defensive coordinator at his alma mater, but he also played football at Iowa State and is a loyal Cyclone.

The Hokey Pokey is Hayden Fry's old dance at the University of Iowa, so it's a little strange to peek into the Kennedy locker room and seeing Knock going through the paces with the Cougars.

"You put your left leg in, You put your right leg in and you shake it all about," the Cougars sing happily.

Knock looks a little sheepish during his gyrations.

"It's hard on me," he confessed last Friday, laughing and shaking his head after Kennedy beat Washington in the playoffs. "It's hard on me, but the kids love it."

Knock is not going to stand in the way of a good thing. The third-ranked Cougars have a 12-0 record and will face second-ranked Bettendorf (12-0) in the Class 4A semifinals at 4:06 p.m. Friday in the UNI-Dome.

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Knock hopes to dance at least two more times this season, once Friday evening and again next week after the finals.

Knock was an eighth grader the last (and only) time the Cougars reached the semifinals of the playoffs. That was in 1993, but that game against Iowa City High was played at Bates Field in Iowa City and not in the UNI-Dome.

The Cougars have played regular-season games against Cedar Falls in the UNI-Dome, but this will be a new experience for head coach Brian White and his players late Friday afternoon.

"Coach White told the kids, we've been in the semifinals before, but never in the Dome," Knock related. "It's pretty special."

Knock grew up with Kennedy football, even before he became a player. His father, Don Knock, spent a long time as Kennedy's head coach and Kyle was a regular at those games. He's just as excited about Friday's game in the UNI-Dome as the players.

"It's pretty awesome," he said. "This is something I've dreamed about since I was 7 years old and on the sideline as a ballboy, a chance to go to the Dome."

Now it's here, nearly 30 years later.

"I've been up there 25 or 30 different times to watch those playoff games as a spectator," said Knock. "Every time I've gone, I've always wondered what it's going to be like if we ever get there."

"I've gone through that in my mind all week long, laying in bed at night," he said Friday. "It's almost going to be like a dream to a certain extent."

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"Obviously our kids aren't satisfied with just getting there. They want to bring home the whole thing. We have a chance to do it.

"Just walking out there, I'm going to take advantage of every second and take it all in."

Kennedy's defense has played very well this season under Knock's leadership. The Cougars have allowed only two touchdowns in three playoff games and feature a bunch of fast, aggressive players who are good tacklers.

Friday's game is loaded with personal feelings for Knock, but he knows the most important thing is helping his players enjoy the experience and win a ballgame.

"These kids have earned it, they deserve it," he said. "The work they put in during the off-season is unbelievable. All the credit goes to them. It's pretty awesome."

Knock has looked into the possibility of becoming a head coach in recent years, but said he's perfectly happy as the defensive coordinator at Kennedy.

"What Coach White has going here and what we have going I think will continue," he said. "I don't think it's just a one-hit wonder.

"I'm good with being the defensive coordinator. He gives me my credit when it's due and I usually deflect it back on the kids.

"I could do this for 30 years."

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Maybe by then he'll learn how to dance.