

Dralle, Cougars aiming for Bettendorf

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kennedy tailback Tyler Dralle has his school record. Now he dearly wants a state title.

The twin pursuits have gone hand-in-hand all year during a magical campaign for the Cougars.

Dralle has rushed for 1,951 yards this season, smashing the school record of 1,662 set by Alex Hillyer in 2012. Now Dralle and the Cougars are two victories away from the first state title in school history.

Kennedy (12-0) meets Bettendorf (12-0) in the semifinals of the Class 4A playoffs Friday at 4:06 p.m. at the UNI-Dome in Cedar Falls. The winner will play for the championship next Friday and that's where the Cougars want to be.

Dralle is certainly not a "me-first" player, but he wanted that school record for himself and his teammates.

"My goal coming in was to beat Alex Hillyer's record of 1,662. And I did that," he said Wednesday during practice inside the Kennedy gym. "I'm just trying to set the bar as high as I can.

"In the playoffs the yards don't even matter anymore," he said. "It's just getting the 'W' any way we can. Anything I get is just extra now."

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Dowling (11-0) plays West Des Moines Valley (10-2) in the other semifinal at 7:06 p.m. Friday.

Dralle leads Class 4A runners in carries (348) and yards this year. His total of 1,951 is second-best in Metro history, trailing the all-time mark of 2,212 set by Andrew Dawson of Washington in 2009.

Dralle rushed for 895 yards last year as a junior and has more than doubled his total this season.

Kennedy coach Brian White said Dralle has been a dream to coach.

"He's amazing and humble. It's never about him," White said. "It's about, 'I just want to win.'"

"He's just a perfect kid to have on your team."

Dralle will carry the ball as many times as the coaches want against Bettendorf. Twenty times, 30 times, 40 times. It doesn't matter. He's done it before and is willing to do it again behind a talented offensive line and receivers who are good blockers.

Dralle has a tremendous work ethic and never seems to get tired.

"I guess I got it from my dad," he said. "He went to Hempstead and in 1979 they won the state championship. He played quarterback, and he pretty much told his coach he wasn't going to play quarterback unless he played defense. So they let him play defense, too."

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Now Dralle hopes to join his father, Jeff, as a state champion.

Kennedy has been one of the biggest rags-to-riches stories in state history this year. The Cougars lost their first six games of the season last year and finished with a 3-8 record, but they used it as a stepping-stone for this season.

"I knew we had a lot of people coming back from last year. We had a ton of starters returning," Dralle said. "I knew we'd be pretty good, but 12-and-0 is incredible. We're just trying to get these last two."

Kennedy will be bucking tradition Friday. Bettendorf has won seven state football titles, the third-most in state history, and the Bulldogs beat the Cougars in the second round of the playoffs last year.

"They've been there," White said. "Whenever you're playing against Bettendorf you're playing against their tradition as well. Their kids believe, no matter what, that they're a superior team and they play like it. And so you have to battle that, too."

Kennedy, ranked No. 3 in the state by the Des Moines Register, has defeated Clinton (59-0), North Scott (49-7) and Washington (21-7) in the playoffs. Bettendorf, ranked No. 2, has victories over Davenport North (42-13), Iowa City West (43-18) and Iowa City High (31-7).

Kennedy gave Bettendorf a good game in the playoffs last year before falling short in the fourth period. The Cougars have settled the score with other teams from last season and now they'd like to add Bettendorf to the list.

"That's kind of been our mantra all year," White said. "We're turning back the clock and trying to avenge a little bit of some of the things that

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happened last year. We don't like the way the season ended. Nobody ever likes it."

Kennedy showed a new wrinkle on offense last week when Shaun Beyer moved into the backfield with Dralle as split tailbacks, flanking quarterback Nick Duehr. Duehr went in motion on several plays and the center snapped the ball directly to Beyer or Dralle for big gains.

On another play, Duehr took a shotgun snap and fired a 61-yard touchdown pass to Beyer as Beyer raced out of the backfield and left the nearest defender way behind.

"We add a couple of things every week that the other team hasn't seen before," Dralle said. "Most of the time it works because they're not ready for it.

"Yeah, we've got a couple of wrinkles for Bettendorf," he said.

White thinks the Cougars could have the bulk of the crowd on their side Friday. It's an easier drive for Kennedy fans and it's a brand-new experience for the Cougars. Kennedy reached the semifinals in 1993, but that game was played outside in Iowa City.

"I've got a sneaky suspicion that our fans will out-number theirs by about 2-to-1, because they've been there so many times," White said. "So we're going to have a big group of people. That might help us out, too."