

Williams, Wills lift Wash by Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

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New Cedar Rapids Washington coach Justin Decker thought Laveechie Williams would miss the first few weeks of the basketball season after Williams broke his nose in early November before practice began.

Decker may have underestimated the 6-foot-5 senior a little bit.

Williams slapped a mask on his face for the season opener and has been a major force with the Warriors, averaging a double-double with 13.8 points and 10.8 rebounds per game.

The Masked Marvel did it again Tuesday night.

Williams scored 15 points and snared 11 rebounds with fierce work off the backboards to help Washington hold off the Kennedy Cougars, 55-51, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at the Washington gym.

Williams is making an early bid for all-conference honors despite having limited vision due to the mask. "My vision is so bad," he said. "When I look to my left or right, I can't even see."

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He sees everything in front of him, however, and was a big reason the Warriors squared their records at 2-2 overall and 1-1 in the MVC.

"He gave us another clutch game," Decker said. "I'm almost getting used to it. He plays so hard."

Williams got whacked in his nose in a pickup game about a month ago. It's still not completely healed, but he won't let it stand in the way of playing ball for the Warriors.

"I was at the YMCA," he explained. "I was playing defense and some dude came back with his hand and it knocked my nose out of place."

Williams cleaned house near the backboards with five offensive rebounds and six off the defensive glass. Meanwhile, 6-foot-1 senior Keion Wills took care of business on the perimeter with four 3-pointers and 18 points.



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Wills poured in 13 points in the first 12 minutes of the game to get the Warriors headed in the right direction. He cooled off for the next 12 minutes, but had a strong finish after the Cougars (2-3, 1-1) surged in the final minutes.

"I got kind of fatigued," said Wills, who found extra energy at the end. "I think I played the whole game tonight (he did). That was a big part of it. I was cramping up a little bit."

Wills was determined to get off to a good start in the intra-city battle.

"I've been in a really bad slump shooting-wise," he said. "All my teammates wanted me to keep going, keep shooting the ball. They knew it couldn't last forever."

Washington owned a 53-43 lead with 2:31 remaining, but Kennedy scored eight strong points and pulled within 53-51 on a 3-pointer by Matt Berst with 57 seconds left. The Cougars got the ball again, missed a 3-pointer for the lead, got the ball again and missed another 3-pointer for the lead with about 13 seconds left.

Williams snared his 11th and final rebound, got fouled and swished both free throws for a 55-51 advantage with 11.8 seconds left. The Cougars fumbled the ball on their final possession and never fired a shot before the buzzer sounded.

"I was really happy with how our guys responded," Decker said. "We were up 10 and all of a sudden they made some plays and they crept back in it and all of a sudden it's a two-point game with the game on the line. We made some clutch free throws and stuff."

Decker wasn't sure how much significance to attach to the victory.

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"It's a big deal, don't get me wrong," he said. "We're just going to try and build off it. The next game is our biggest game. We're going to enjoy this for one night.

"We have some talented kids," he said. "I hope this isn't the last big one, you know what I mean?"

Williams was happy to contribute to the victory.

"That's a real big win, " he said. "That's a great team. I'm just glad we were able to get a 'W.'"

Ian Thomas chipped in 11 points for Washington.

Drake Brewster led Kennedy with 18 points and eight rebounds. Matt Gardner scored 15 points and Derrick Diggins had 10.

Kennedy shot 18 for 54 from the field for 33.3 percent and was only 4 for 22 on 3-pointers. Washington hit 20 of 43 shots for 46.5 percent and was 5 for 14 on 3-pointers. The Warriors owned the backboards, 36-24.

KENNEDY (51): Haynes 1 0-0 3, Brewster 5 8-9 18, Gardner 6 1-1 15, Girling 0 0-0 0, Berst 2 0-0 5, Duehr 0 0-0 0, Diggins 4 2-3 10, Bisenius 0 0-0 0, Beyer 0 0-0 0, Wall 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 11-13 51.

WASHINGTON (55): Wills 6 2-2 18, Strait 2 0-0 5, Dawson 1 0-0 2, C.Beard 0 0-0 0, Bennett 0 0-0 0, Hobbs 1 0-0 2, Thomas 3 5-7 11, Jackson 1 0-0 2, Williams 6 3-4 15. Totals 20 10-13 55.

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Halftime - Washington 29, Kennedy 25. 3-point goals - Kennedy 4 (Gardner 2, Haynes 1, Berst 1), Washington 5 (Wills 4, Strait 1).