

No. 2 Cougars knock off Wahlert

Written by Clete Campbell

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DUBUQUE – Right now, the Kennedy girls basketball team's winning formula is as true as H₂O: Hydrogen plus oxygen equals water.

The usual Lela Sellers razzle-dazzle, balanced scoring, sniper shooting, lockdown defense and quality bench contributions have made the Cougars the hottest club in Iowa Class 5A this side of undefeated Indianola.

Dubuque Wahlert threw everything it had at the No. 2-ranked Cougars on Friday night with an inspired, intense defensive effort, but the Cougars knew exactly what chess moves to make in running their winning streak to 12.

Sellers muscled her way to a game-high 15 points, Sydney Hayden delivered a trio of 3-pointers, Ashley Hamilton exploded off the bench for eight tide-turning third-quarter points and Kennedy rode a third-quarter surge to a breakaway 60-41 road victory in one of the Mississippi Valley Conference's toughest venues.

It may be early January, but the fun-loving Cougars' sizzling play is leaving opponents sun-burned. Cyndi Lauper of "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" fame didn't have this much fun.

"I'd give us an 'A' (grade) right now," said Hayden, who delivered 11 points. "We're having so much fun right now. That's what means the most to us: We're having fun.

"No matter what our record is, we want to be loving what we're doing for all the time we're putting into this. I think we're

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getting a good outcome every game.”

Are they ever. Since the calendar turned to 2016, Kennedy (12-1) has taken out a previously unbeaten North Scott team (Jan. 2), upended then-No. 9 Linn-Mar and toppled a never-die-easy Wahlert team on the road. This week was a pretty good seven days of work for Kennedy.

“They have really good chemistry and are really buying into what we're doing,” said Kennedy coach Tony Vis, who's rewarding his team with the weekend off. “I'd like to say it's me. It's not. They're doing all the hard work.

“This is a place that's claimed a lot of good teams.”

But not Kennedy. On a night when the cagey Golden Eagles (4-7) were within six at halftime, relentlessly trapped and pressured them for 32 minutes, and kept tighter tabs on the electric Sellers than the Secret Service keeps on the president, the Cougars went downtown to put Wahlert away.

“This is the best 3-point shooting team we've played,” Eagles coach Kris Spiegler said. “They hit some big shots.”

Hamilton, a 5-10 junior forward of all trades, delivered eight points in a span of 80 seconds late in the third quarter to supersize a 10-point lead to 19.

“I was just trying to get open and knock them down,” Hamilton said.

Kennedy's unbudgingly tough man-to-man defense limited Wahlert to a cold 27-percent (14-for-51) shooting line. Guard Katy Fricano's 13 points paced

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the Eagles.

The game began on a strange note as officials ticketed Wahlert for a pregame bookkeeping error, sending Hailey Dolphin to the free throw line to open the contest. Dolphin's two free throws were just the beginning of another impressive night for the MVC's hottest club.

KENNEDY (60): Kate Choate 0-0 2-2 2, Carly Langhurst 2-4 1-2 6, Ashley Hamilton 3-5 0-0 8, Sydney Hayden 3-6 3-6 2-2 11, Lela Sellers 3-13 6-11 15, Alana Steele 0-0 5-6 5, Paige Timmerman 0-0 1-2 1, Olivia Hellweg 0-2 0-0 0, Hailey Dolphin 0-6 3-4 3, Linden Runels 3-4 0-0 8, Kendel Meier 0-0 1-2 1. Totals 14-40 21-31 60.

WAHLERT (41): Jessalyn Roling 0-2 0-0 0, Alli Osterberger 3-8 1-2 7, Katy Fricano 5-13 3-4 13, Krystal Tranel 1-6 2-2 4, Kelly Boge 2-3 0-0 4, Charlotte Flynn 3-16 1-3 10, Amelia Noonan 1-3 1-5 3. Totals 15-51 10-16 41.

Halftime – Kennedy 29, Wahlert 23. 3-point goals – Kennedy 9 (Hayden 3, Hamilton 2, Runels 2, Langhurst, Sellers), Wahlert 3 (Flynn 3).