

Cougars hit low point in 56-37 loss

Written by Jim Ecker

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It's nearly late January and the Cedar Rapids Kennedy boys basketball team is still searching for answers.

Coach Jon McKowen is beginning to wonder if they'll find them in time.

The Cougars hit a power outage Tuesday night and were stuffed by Johnston, 56-37, in a non-conference game at Kennedy that dropped the Cougars to 5-and-7 for the campaign following two straight trips to the state tournament.

Kennedy made only four field goals in the first half and shot poorly for the entire game, finishing 13 of 51 for 25.5 percent, and their output of 37 points was the lowest in McKowen's three years as head coach. The previous low was 43 points in a 53-43 setback to Ames earlier this season.

The Cougars trailed 29-14 at halftime Tuesday and never caught up.

"As players we're not messing, but as coaches we're also not meshing with each other," McKowen said outside the quiet Kennedy locker room. "Now is the time. Our backs are against the wall and it's kind of desperation time. We have to figure each other out pretty quick."

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Johnston had a tremendous height advantage over Kennedy with a roster chocked with players who stand 6-foot-8, 6-foot-7, 6-foot-6, 6-foot-6, 6-foot-5 and 6-foot-5, but McKowen did not think size was the problem.

"No. It was us," he said. "We didn't pass the ball on time, we didn't get open on time. We played offense 1-against-3. We tried to beat three guys all night, instead of delivering the ball on time."

"So when you do that, you get halves with 14 points. We're making this game difficult because we're not using our teammates correctly."

Kennedy's scoring output has dropped from 67.4 points per game last season to 53.8 points this season. Its overall shooting has dropped from 45.9 percent to 38.4 percent, and its 3-point shooting has fallen from 37.0 percent to 28.9 percent.

McKowen has tinkered with his starting lineup and rotation, especially with 6-foot-5 leaper Shaun Beyer sidelined with a sprained ankle, but none of the combinations worked Tuesday. None of the Cougars managed to score in double figures and nobody made more than three baskets.

Matt Gardner led Kennedy with eight points. Drake Brewster and Matt Berst had seven points. Derrick Diggins scored five.

Johnston arrived in Cedar Rapids with a 3-8 record, but the Dragons are a much better team than their record would indicate. Six of their eight losses have been to ranked teams from the CIML with setbacks to No. 1 West Des Moines Valley, No. 3 Des Moines Hoover, No. 6 Ankeny (twice), No. 7 Dowling Catholic and No. 9 Ankeny Centennial.

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"They've played the second-toughest schedule in the state," McKowen said. "It's not a three-win team and it will equal out."

Kennedy made only one basket in the second quarter on a 3-pointer by Diggings. All the other shots clanged off the rim.

The Cougars fell behind by 18 points at 32-14 early in the third quarter, but their best flurry of the night pulled them within seven points at 34-27 and 36-29 before the Dragons pulled away for good.

Jared Bacon led Johnston with 17 points. Erik Francois scored 12.

JOHNSTON (56): Kramer 0 2-2 2, Bacon 3 10-10 17, Kephart 2 1-2 6, Francois 5 0-0 12, Proctor 1 2-4 4, Bergstrom 0 0-0 0, Vander Zwaag 3 1-2 9, Gossling 0 0-0 0, Jones 1 2-4 4, Lucas 0 0-0 0, Geers 0 0-0 0, Voss 0 0-0 0, Vander Werff 1 0-0 2, Meyer 0 0-0 0, Nussbaum 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 19-25 56.

KENNEDY (37): Haynes 1 0-0 3, Brewster 3 1-1 7, Gardner 3 1-1 8, Girling 0 2-2 2, Berst 2 1-2 7, Duehr 0 0-0 0, Krall 0 0-0 0, Diggins 2 0-0 5, Foley 0 0-0 0, Bisenius 1 0-0 2, Wiebel 0 0-0 0, King 0 0-0 0, Wall 1 1-1 3, Olejniczak 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 6-7 37.

Halftime - Johnston 29, Kennedy 14. 3-point goals - Johnston 5 (Francois 2, Vander Zwaag 2, Kephart 1), Kennedy 5 (Berst 2, Haynes 1, Gardner 1, Diggins 1).