

No. 1 Cougars ripped by Cedar Falls

Written by Nick Petaros, Waterloo Courier
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CEDAR FALLS - Cedar Falls coach Gregg Groen says there's nothing flashy about the manner in which his girls' basketball team defends. Friday night, it was the Tigers' hard-nosed, man-to-man approach that allowed Groen's team to force its way into the conversation as one of the state's best.

Class 5A's No. 10-rated Cedar Falls held No. 1 Kennedy 13 points below its season-low to take over sole possession of first place in the Mississippi Valley Conference Valley Division standings with an eye-opening, 46-30 victory.

"We just play man-to-man defense," Groen said after his team held Kennedy to 9 of 41 shooting. "We really don't do that much special. It becomes a team effort of how can we collectively shut them down. Tonight I thought the girls came out and I thought they played extremely well defensively."

After patiently passing the ball around Kennedy's zone defense in the first quarter to take a 13-8 lead aided by three Kiana Barney 3-pointers, the Tigers (13-1, 8-0) held Kennedy (14-2, 7-1) scoreless for the final six minutes of the second quarter resulting in a commanding 24-12 halftime advantage.

It was an off shooting night for a Kennedy team that has been so strong all season. Cougars coach Tony Vis said Cedar Falls had a lot to do with that.

"They defensively were very, very solid," Vis said. "They got up into us, were very physical, and I think it bothered our kids a little bit. We didn't have the best shooting. At the same time I think that's more of their defense, their length and their game plan. There's a reason we had a bad night."

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One matchup that stood out, in particular, was the work of Barney on Kennedy's leading scorer Lela Sellers. The Cedar Falls sophomore held the Cougar all-stater, who was averaging 20 points a game, to nine points on 3 of 10 shooting. It marked the first time Sellers had been held under 10 points all season.

"I worked on it a lot in practice," Barney said, addressing the assignment. "Did a lot of preparation on staying low, keeping my legs moving and I had a lot of help from my teammates."

In addition to Barney's defensive work, Cedar Falls junior guard Reilly Johnson held 5A's leading 3-point shooter Sydney Hayden to three points on a 1-of-4 clip.

Offensively, Cedar Falls was efficient as center Cynthia Wolf hit all five of her first-half attempts and finished with 16 points on 7-of-10 shooting. Senior Emma Gerdes made all five of her second-half shots and added 13 points to go with five assists.

"It was exciting because we were moving the ball around a lot more," Wolf said. "That's what we were looking for was to keep the ball movement and then hopefully that will open up more for us to get 3's off and get inside. It's just exciting to see how everyone is bonding and getting better."

In addition to taking a major step toward the division title, this victory could help position Cedar Falls favorably in the rankings to earn home court advantage this postseason.

"I've said for a while I think Cedar Falls is underrated," said Vis, whose Kennedy team never crept closer than 11 points after the first minute of the second half. "I thought they were a top-five team. We knew they were

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playing well. We saw some of the scores, and we knew we were going to play a hot team that was playing their best basketball of the year. We ran into a buzz-saw tonight."

Added Barney, "It was definitely a statement game, but we have to keep working to improve ourselves more."

CEDAR FALLS (46): Reilly Johnson 1-3 1-3 4, Emma Gerdes 6-11 0-0 13, Ally Conrad 1-3 1-2 3, Kiana Barney 3-5 1-2 10, Cynthia Wolf 7-10 2-2 16, Calli Johnson 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 18-35 5-9 46.

KENNEDY (30): Carly Langhurst 0-3 3-4 3, Sydney Hayden 1-4 0-0 3, Lela Sellers 3-10 2-2 9, Hailey Dolphin 2-6 1-2 5, Linden Runels 0-3 2-2 2, Ashley Hamilton 3-9 0-0 8, Olivia Hellweg 0-2 0-0 0, Kendal Meier 0-1 0-0 0, Hailey Paup 0-0 0-0 0, Paige Timmerman 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 9-41 8-10 30.

Halftime - Cedar Falls 24, Kennedy 12. 3-point goals - Cedar Falls 5 (Barney 3, Gerdes, R. Johnson), Kennedy 4 (Hamilton 2, Hayden, Sellers).
Total fouls - Cedar Falls 11, Kennedy 14. Fouled out - none.