

Surging Cougars feast on winning streak

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 22 October 2012 22:00 -

Their food tastes better. Classes are more fun. The girls at school look prettier.

Life is good for the Kennedy football team these days as it heads into the Class 4A playoffs after an 0-and-5 start.

"Yup, everything is better," linebacker Grant Miller agreed after practice Monday at Kingston Stadium.

The surging Cougars (4-5) will take a four-game winning streak to Muscatine (7-2) for the first round of the playoffs Wednesday night.

Speaking of food, the offensive linemen and tight end were headed to quarterback Riley Fergus' house after practice Monday for a nice meal, courtesy of Riley's family.

"Riley made this deal with us at the beginning of the year," lineman Austin Holzer explained, looking forward to a plateful of burgers, cheeseburgers and all the trimmings.

When Kennedy wins and Fergus is not sacked, the offensive linemen and tight end get a free meal from the QB's family. That's the deal.

"Two weeks ago after the Jefferson game we all got steak dinners, so that was pretty nice," said Drew Heitland, another big eater.

Holzer is 6-foot-4 and 265 pounds while Heitland stands 6-3, 270, so that means lots of grub for the beef-eaters up front.

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"We've got great parents that have supported us throughout this whole thing. And that helps," Coach Tim Lewis said. "We've been through the rough times."

The Cougars began the season with five straight losses to Washington, Prairie, Iowa City West, Dubuque Senior and Xavier. They averaged 13.4 points and gave up 29.8, a losing formula.

"The first five games, our offense would play well and our defense would play bad. Our defense would play well and our offense would play bad," Heitland recounted. "It was hard trying to get it to come together.

"It seemed like the first five games we were just dead on defense, walking around like zombies. Now we play with emotion and have a lot more fun."

Those first five weeks were rough.

"It was tough getting up every day," Heitland said, "but I knew we were a very good team and I thought we could pull it out. It was just hard knowing we were such a good team, but we couldn't get all together at once."

Kennedy began to turn its season around with a 44-0 victory over Jefferson in Week 6. They rallied from a big deficit to beat Waterloo East, 38-30, on a cold night in Waterloo, then finished with big victories over Dubuque Hempstead (48-7) and Iowa City High (40-14).

The triumph at Iowa City High clinched a playoff berth.

The schedule got easier during the second part of the season, but the Cougars say they became a different team with a different attitude coming down the stretch.

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"We just bought into what our coaches were saying," Holzer remarked. "Just play with enthusiasm, play as a team, and we pulled through all of the hard times and now we're in this great position."

"Now we're playing with enthusiasm and it's catching on to other people and everybody is jumping around and having fun."

It's contagious.

"We played the first five games pretty flat. We weren't yelling and we weren't getting excited," Miller said. "We really picked it up. I think that's the key thing."

The Cougars like to eat, but the food didn't taste as good during the losing streak as it does now.

"There's no good taste in your mouth when you have a five-game losing streak," Holzer said. "Everybody just wanted to get that first win and get that bad taste out of our mouth."

Now they get a fresh start in the playoffs, where everybody is 0-and-0.

"There's not one goal that we set at the beginning of the season that we can't accomplish," Lewis remarked. "And that's kind of cool."

Tailback Alex Hillyer has run for a school-record 1,418 yards this season, accounting for 56.9 percent of the total offense. Maybe he should treat his blockers to steaks and burgers as well.