

Cougars trip Lions for trip to state

Written by Mike Condon

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The Kennedy Cougars are at their best when they are "playing downhill."

Coach Jon McKowen's team prides itself in being aggressive on both ends of the floor and it was evident in Tuesday's night's Class 4A substate final against Linn-Mar at the U.S. Cellular Center.

The Cougars had the Lions on their heels from the start. The offensive strategy was to get to the basket and it resulted in 42 free throw attempts. On defense the plan was to harass the Lion duo of Jordan Bohannon and Nic Uhlir all over the floor.

The result was a hard-fought 58-54 win and a second straight trip to the state tournament. Kennedy (18-5) drew the No. 6 seed and will play No. 3 seed Pleasant Valley on Wednesday, March 11 at 6:35 p.m. in Des Moines at Wells Fargo Arena.

Linn-Mar closes its season at 18-5.

"That's the way we play," McKowen said of his team's aggressive style. "We like to play in attack mode with our speed and our quickness. In a game like this, if you are going to go home, you are going to go home doing your stuff."

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"We did our stuff tonight and played a really good basketball game."

Kennedy's pressure took a toll on the Lions, especially in the first half. The Lions are a team that has lived by the 3-point shot all year.

They were 0 for 14 in the first half from distance as Kennedy raced to a 28-19 halftime lead.

"We made them do things they don't normally do," said Kennedy senior guard Zach Daniels. "They started taking some bad shots and we were able to take advantage of that."

The advantage came mostly at the free throw line. Early in both halves, the Cougars got to the bonus and were able to build and maintain their lead. Kennedy had just 12 field goals in the game, compared to 21 for the Lions.

As one might expect in a game with so much at stake, the play was physical on both sides. In fact, Daniels picked up a technical foul midway through the second quarter for protesting a non-call. Bohannon hit both free throws, cutting the Kennedy lead to 20-19.

The technical seemed to inspire the Cougars as they held Linn-Mar scoreless over the final 3:32 of the half while scoring eight points over that span.

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