

Murdock helps Cougars hold off Wash

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cole Murdock has already made a name for himself as a premier golfer at the high school level, but the Cedar Rapids Kennedy senior has elevated his game on the basketball floor as well.

Murdock scored 13 points and led the Cougars to a 63-57 victory over the Washington Warriors in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Kennedy Tuesday.

Murdock was primarily a shooter and off-guard for Kennedy last year when AJ Carter ran the show, but he's made a smooth transition to the point this season with his ballhandling, passing and shooting.

"He had the skill set last year. He might not have had the confidence," said Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen. "The team puts a lot of faith in him and he's taken over a leadership role."

And make no mistake, Murdock likes running the club.

"I feel like I'm 100 percent the leader of the team this year," he said. "I'm trying to get everyone

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involved.

"Yeah, I enjoy the team looking at me. They want to know what I want to do, instead of me looking at someone else. I was looking at AJ last year, and now they're all looking at me."

Murdock's scoring average has not changed a whole lot, going from 8.9 per game last season to 10.0 this year, but his overall performance is vastly improved.

"It's 99 percent upstairs," said McKowen. "He's become really tough from a mental standpoint. He does a lot more for this team than just score."

McKowen likes the way Murdock handles the ball, comparing the slender senior to a football player in sneakers.

"He just puts the ball under his arm and runs. That's how good he dribbles the ball," the coach said. "He's gotten a lot stronger, too, so he's keeping his balance."

Murdock served as the backup point guard last year when Carter took a break, as well as starting at one of the wing positions. "We knew he was going to be OK," said McKowen, "and he's developed to be pretty good."

Murdock was a prominent member of Kennedy's successful golf team during his career and has been recruited by several colleges for golf. He plans to visit the University of Northern Iowa on Wednesday and visit with the golf team, but he's not sure if he'll play golf or basketball in college.

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He's leaning toward golf, but that could change. "We'll see," he remarked. "We'll see how this year goes."

Kennedy (3-1, 2-0) opened a 52-38 lead in the second half Tuesday, but Washington began hitting some shots and pulled within 56-53 with 1:11 left on two free throws by Maurice Arrington. Murdock gave Kennedy a 58-53 lead with two foul shots and Zach Daniels added a free throw to make it 59-53.



Keion Willis pulled Washington (1-2, 0-2) within 59-55 and 61-57 with two strong layups, but the Warriors ran out of time.

"I liked our fight coming back," said Washington Coach Adam Sanchez. "I'm proud of the way we battled and came back. We very easily could have folded up in the third (period) when they made a big run on us."

Washington played shorthanded again Tuesday. Dallas Hobbs is out for the season when a knee injury suffered during the football campaign and three other players will be sidelined until after the holiday break with academic issues and other factors, according to Sanchez.

Willis was the only Warrior in double figures with 10 points. Keegan Moore snared 12 rebounds

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for Washington.

Brendon Manning played a strong game on the backboards with eight rebounds for Kennedy and matched Murdock with 13 points. Daniels finished with 12 points.

"We played three good quarters, I'd say," Murdock remarked. "We kind of started looking at the scoreboard, watching it all kind of fall apart there at the end. I started to get a little nervous."

McKowen liked the way his club held on, even if it did get a little too exciting for his taste. "If you're ever thrilled with the whole game at this time of the season, it's going to be a long season because you can only go down," he said.

WASHINGTON (57): Kramer 3 0-0 8, Strait 0 0-0 0, Hoeger 2 2-2 8, Willis 4 2-2 10, Arrington 3 3-4 9, Moore 3 1-2 7, Thulin 1 0-0 2, Williams 4 0-0 8, Dawson 0 0-0 0, Good-Jones 2 1-1 5. Totals 22 7-11 57.

KENNEDY (63): Daniels 4 3-5 12, Heisler 1 3-4 6, Murdock 4 3-6 13 Gardner 3 0-0 7, Techau 2 0-0 4, Brewster 3 2-2 8, Manning 3 7-10 13 Girling 0 0-0 0, Wall 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 18-27 63.

Halftime - Kennedy 28, Washington 22. 3-point goals - Washington 4 (Kramer 2, Hoeger 2), Kennedy 5 (Murdock 2, Daniels 1, Heisler 1, Gardner 1). Fouled out - Arringtn.