

Sellers leads Cougars by Saints

Written by Carl Gonder

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Kennedy girls basketball coach Tony Vis says he is glad that Lela Sellers “fell in his lap.” Friday night at Xavier High School, we found out why.

Sellers played all five positions and had a game-high 24 points, scoring eight points in the final three minutes, to help Class 5A 10th-ranked Kennedy win a 55-52 thriller 55-52 over Class 4A No. 13 Xavier in Mississippi Valley Conference action at Xavier.

Kennedy moves to 5-1 for the season. Xavier drops to 3-3.

Sellers, a versatile 6-footer, transferred from Minnesota this past summer when her father landed a new job in Cedar Rapids.

“It was a fun and intense game,” Sellers said. “Xavier came out aggressive and we had to come out and play well.”

Sellers is receiving interest from a number of different schools including Iowa, Iowa State, Bradley, Northern Iowa, Drake and several others. At least one scout was in the stands Friday night.

“I thought Lela was really good, especially in the fourth quarter when the money was on the table,” Vis said of his star. “She is a great kid and really fun to coach.”

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Vis smiled at the thought of a potential all-state caliber player like Sellers showing up on his doorstep.

“She really is unique. When she fell into our laps, she was exactly what we needed,” Vis said. “We needed somebody that was a difference maker, somebody that is versatile, able to play one to four (positions).”

Friday night Sellers did just that.

Down 32-19 at the half, Xavier put on an impressive defensive and offensive display in the third quarter, outscoring Kennedy 20-7 to tie the game at 39-all. The fourth quarter was a back and forth affair with neither team leading by more than three points.

With the game on the line, it became the Lela Sellers show.

Morgan Breitbach’s two free throws with 2:49 remaining put Xavier ahead, 50-47. Sellers then made a free throw, had a three-point play off a nifty drive to the hoop and hit another free throw at the 1:10 mark to give Kennedy a 52-50 edge. Her drives to the basket kept the Cougars afloat.

The Saints’ Meghan Joens scored a layup with 19 seconds on the clock to tie the game at 52-52.

The key play of the game came when Sellers drove the lane again and Xavier was whistled for a blocking foul. She hit both free throws with 13 ticks left to give her team a 54-52 lead.

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Xavier was assessed a traveling violation with four seconds left, before Kennedy's Sydney Hayden sank one of two free throws, making it 55-52. Even then, Xavier had one last chance.

After a Kennedy timeout, Breitbach's running and leaning 3-pointer from the right side was on the mark, but banked off the rim as the horn sounded.

"It could have gone either way," Sellers said of the blocking call. "I was glad it was a block."

Vis said his team somehow got on its heels in the third quarter.

"You have to give credit to Xavier and Tom Lilly," Vis said. "Xavier did a great job coming back and they are going to be even more of a handful as a team in February."

Lizzy Bailey led the Saints with 19 points. McKenna Andersen added 14.

Xavier Coach Tom Lilly was somewhat philosophical.

"It was a great high school game," Lilly said. "Too bad so many people stayed home watching Iowa-Iowa State."

Lilly said he "was really proud of the fact that our kids didn't quit" and indicated that "the difference was that (Kennedy's) best player wanted the ball in her hands and she took over and we fouled."

Lilly said the blocking call was a key play.

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“Too bad we couldn’t have gotten the charge call, but it didn’t happen,” he said. “That would have been a big difference-maker.”

KENNEDY (55): Hamilton 4 0-0 10, Hayden 2 1-4 6, Sellers 7 8-11 24, Runels 1 2-2 5, Dolphin 0 1-2 1, Botkin 3 3-4 9. Totals 17 15-24 55.

XAVIER (52): Bailey 8 0-2 19, Andersen 5 1-2 14, Breitbach 1 2-3 5, Christianson 0 0-2 0, Nelson 1 0-0 2, Drahozal 2 0-0 5, Ivester 1 0-0 2, Joens 2 1-4 5. Totals 20 4-13 52.

Halftime - Kennedy 32, Xavier 19. 3-point goals – Kennedy 6 (Hamilton 2, Hayden 1, Sellers 2, Runels 1).
Xavier 8
(Bailey 3, Andersen 3, Breitbach 1, Drahozal 1).