

Jefferson slips past Warriors, 55-52

Written by Tom Fruehling

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If ever there was a proverbial team win, the Jefferson boys earned one Monday night.

The heroes were many as they hung-on and hung together down the stretch to eke out a 55-52 Class 4A substate victory over Washington in the Prairie gym.

Savvy senior Adam Van Oort kept them in the game in the first half, and sparkplug point guard Royshawn Webb took control in the second.

Jack-of-all-trades Valentino Green, as usual, was all over the floor taking charges, diving for loose balls, making steals and crashing the boards.

And how about quiet junior Kane Kramer?

He came back in the game with 10 seconds to go, was immediately fouled and calmly sank two free throws to give the J-Hawks a three-point cushion.

“That’s who we wanted with the ball,” said Jefferson Coach Brandon Horman. “You ask the guys on the team and they’ll tell you we want Kane on the line. He just never gets rattled.”

Even the boys on the bench got a shoutout from their coach.

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“As I told them in the locker room,” Horman said, “if the guys that didn’t get in hadn’t been pushing the others in practice, we wouldn’t have been in the position we were in to win a close game like this.”

And this one couldn’t have been any closer.

Back and forth most of the way, with a thrill-a-minute fourth quarter that saw both teams battling for all they were worth until the very end.



“It was a high intensity game,” said Van Oort, who led all scorers with 21 points and had three crucial 3-pointers. “It was a little flat at first. But we both played with a lot more energy in the second.

“It was a fun game to play.”

With the victory, Jefferson (10-13) swept all three games this season from crosstown rival Washington (7-15).

Now the J-Hawks have a chance to avenge two earlier blowouts by second-ranked Iowa City West (17-4) in the substate semifinal Friday at 7 p.m. on the Trojans home court.

“That’ll be a tough game,” Van Oort admitted in light of previous losses by 26 and 28 points. “But we’ll be ready. We’ll be ready for an upset.”

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Second-year coach Horman, who saw his team run out of its own gym by West, 102-74, two weeks ago, promised there will be no quit in his vastly improved squad. The J-Hawks, after all, have bounced back big from a dismal 1-21 record a year ago.

“We’re going to have to play better defense, that’s for sure,” Horman said. “But we’ll come up with a game plan.”

He figures the clutch win over Washington will be a confidence-builder.

The J-Hawks missed a bunch of bunnies under the basket in the first half, while the Warriors used a balanced attack to take a 26-21 lead.

Flashy Washington guard Keion Wills got hot after intermission, scoring 13 of his team-high 17 points.

He nailed two straight 3-pointers to give his team a 39-38 lead early in the fourth quarter, but Van Oort came right back with one of his own to re-claim a two-point margin.

It was nip-and-tuck from then on.

The J-Hawks’ Webb, a shiftily little playmaker, scored all 13 of his points in the second half. And none were more important than his driving layup to put his team up 52-49 with a minute left. He later added a free throw.

Wills willed-in a 3-pointer from the corner with 10 seconds to go to cut the deficit to a single point.

But Kramer then stepped up the seal the deal for Jefferson.

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“All of us really picked it up in the second half,” Webb said afterward. “We did what we did in the first half. We just did it better.”

WASHINGTON (52): Wills 7 0-0 17, Strait 4 1-2 10, Dawson 0 0-0 0, Williams 6 0-0 12, Potter 1 1-2 3, Bennett 0 0-0 0, Hobbs 1 2-2 4, Thomas 3 0-0 6. Totals: 22 4-6 52.

JEFFERSON (55): Webb 6 1-2 13, Green 3 0-2 6, Kramer 1 2-2 5, Van Oort 9 0-0 21, McKinney 4 1-3 9, Brown 0 1-2 1, McCauley 0 0-0 0. Totals 23 5-11 55.

Halftime: Washington 26, Jefferson 21. 3-point goals: Washington 4 (Wills 3, Strait), Jefferson 4 (Van Oort 3, Kramer). Fouled out: Wills.