

Manning paces Cougars by Solon

Written by Jim Ecker

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Brendon Manning broke his ankle midway through the season last year and made only a marginal contribution to the Kennedy basketball team at 3.2 points and 1.6 rebounds per game.

The 6-foot-4 senior is a different guy this year.

Manning scored 18 points and grabbed 14 rebounds Saturday night as the Cougars topped Solon, 63-49, in a sluggish affair at the Kennedy gym for his second big outing in a row.

Manning collected 25 points, eight rebounds and six assists Friday when Kennedy upended eighth-ranked Dubuque Hempstead, 83-76, in Dubuque. That means he averaged 21.5 points and 11 rebounds for the weekend, a far cry from what he contributed a year ago.

Manning is averaging 14 points and 6.7 rebounds overall for Kennedy, which raised its record to 5-1 Saturday.

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Manning has lived in the weight room and worked hard on his game since getting hurt last season.

"I wanted to have a strong senior year," he said. "I didn't want to let my ankle bother me."

Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen likes Manning's basketball IQ and his determination to improve.

"He has a really good knack and mind-set for the ball," said McKowen. "A lot of the points he gets are generated off his rebounding and his cuts and his movement. He's making his teammates better."

"We saw this in practice last year with him, so it wasn't a huge surprise to us. Plus he's gotten stronger, too."

Kennedy bolted to a 14-0 lead in the first quarter and appeared headed for an easy victory, but the Cougars got listless after that and Solon pulled within 30-27 at halftime.

Kennedy had a 36-31 lead early in the second half when Manning ignited the small gathering of fans with a rebound dunk that looked like something you'd see on SportsCenter, but he modestly claimed it was an accident.

"I just kind of stuck my hands up there and I got lucky," he said.

Bryton Heisler gave Kennedy a 49-35 lead with a six-point flurry of his own and the Cougars stayed at least 10 points in front for the rest of the game. The early 14-0 lead turned out to be the final margin of victory against the Class 3A visitors from the Wamac Conferenc.

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Heisler finished with 17 points for Kennedy.

McKowen saw the same pattern repeat itself in victories over Washington, Hempstead and Solon this past week.

"We struggle sustaining for 32 minutes right now," he said. "It's a good time for Christmas break, because that's something we can learn during the break.

"When we get mentally tired, I feel like we're letting teams in it. We did it all three times this week. As long as you recognize it's your weakness and you figure out how to work on it, we're going to get a lot better at it.

"That's a good problem to have, to try and figure out how to put good teams away."

Jackson Rushek and Streeter McIlravy scored 14 points apiece for Solon (3-4). Emilio Villagrana had 13.

Zach Daniels scored 10 points for Kennedy.

SOLON (49): Villagrana 6 0-0 13, Rushek 4 5-6 14, Doyle 0 2-2 2, Nicol 0 0-0 0, Childs 0 4-6 4, McIlravy 7 0-2 14, Black 0 0-0 0, Coons 1 0-0 2.
Totals 18 11-16 49.

KENNEDY (63): Daniels 3 2-2 10, Odom 0 0-0 0, Heisler 6 2-3 17, Murdock 2 0-1 4, Gardner 1 0-0 2, Techau 2 0-0 4, Krystofiak 0 0-0 0, Eberly 0 0-0 0, Brewster 4 0-0 8, Manning 7 4-4 18, Girling 0 0-0 0, Hall 0 0-0 0, Ross 0 0-0 0. Totals 25 8-10 63.

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Halftime - Kennedy 30, Solon 27. 3-point goals - Solon 2 (Villgrana 1, Rushek 1), Kennedy 5 (Heisler 3, Daniels 2).