

No.9 Cougars roll by Tigers

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 27 February 2015 23:01 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 March 2015 15:07



Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen has preached to his team all year about the importance of playing their best basketball at the end of the season when it really counts.

The Cougars are getting pretty darn close.

Kennedy rode two different 13-0 streaks Friday night to an impressive 71-55 conquest of Cedar Falls in the Class 4A substate semifinals at Kennedy.

Now comes the showdown that Metro fans have craved with the ninth-ranked Cougars (17-5) facing the sixth-ranked Linn-Mar Lions (18-4) in the substate finals Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the U.S. Cellular Center for a berth in the state tournament.

Cole Murdock and Zach Daniels picked Cedar Falls apart with their sharp passing Friday night, the Cougars attacked the backboards with reckless abandon and Brendon Manning got the place jumping with a rebound dunk with the game just 20 seconds old.

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"We had an amazing week of practice and it showed tonight," said McKowen. "It wasn't a perfect game, but I don't know if you can ever play a perfect game. But we played long stretches of really good basketball.

"We're pretty excited about the way we're playing right now," he said. "I feel like we're firing on all cylinders."

The Cougars will have to keep firing Tuesday night when they face arch-rival Linn-Mar, which handed them a 74-61 licking Jan. 6 at Kennedy. The Lions are playing at a high level as well after bopping Waterloo West, 66-45, in the substate semifinals.

"It's going to take a night like tonight where we do our stuff really well," said McKowen. "We want to take away a few of their things, but we don't get caught up too much in the other team. We really have to do our stuff well."

The Cougars did their stuff really well against Cedar Falls, starting with that stuff by Manning with fans still settling into their seats. He collected an offensive rebound and slammed it home, getting himself and his teammates fired up.

"It's always good to get a dunk. It kind of gets the team going," said Manning, who finished with 20 points despite foul trouble. "I think at the start of the game it boosted our confidence and got us going."

The game was tied 18-18 when Kennedy went on its first 13-0 spurt for a 31-18 lead. Cedar Falls scored the next four points, but the Cougars took off on another 13-0 surge for a 44-22 bulge. All told, it was an impressive 26-4 stretch that spanned the halves.

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"The nice thing about it is, you don't sit on the bench and say, 'Holy cow, when is this going to end?'" McKowen remarked. "It just felt like the normal flow of the game."

The Cougars caused all sorts of havoc with their quick hands and quick feet on defense in their zone defense, forcing turnovers and deflections that fueled their offense. Meanwhile, Kennedy's two-headed point guard tandem of Murdock and Daniels made a series of slick passes to cutting teammates for easy buckets.

Murdock finished with eight assists and Daniels had seven. Daniels also had five steals, several on headlong dives.

"They can do just about anything," said Bryton Heisler, who finished with 17 points. "When they're not scoring, they can find people that are open and help them score."

Murdock and Daniels were hot from 3-point range in the 74-61 victory at Cedar Falls Jan. 23. This time, the two Cougars attacked in the offensive zone when the Tigers took away their long-range shots.

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"Their passing was great," said McKowen. "They're so quick with the ball and they get themselves in advantage situations. Their passing went to the next level tonight, because we were open on time."

Kennedy had an 8-4 record and had just lost to Johnston when it faced Cedar Falls the first time in Blackhawk County. The Cougars trailed the Tigers by eight points at halftime that night, but outscored them by 21 points in the second half and won by 13.

McKowen said that was a turning point in the season.

"In the locker room we had a good discussion (after that game): Who do we want to be and what's our identity going to be?," he said. "We've been dictating tempo much better since and it's made a big difference in our team."

Manning scored 12 points in the first quarter Friday night, but he picked up his second foul with 34 seconds left in the period and took a seat.

McKowen gambled and put him back in the game early in the second quarter after Cedar Falls had pulled within 18-16 and the strategy worked when Manning scored four points for a 24-18 lead.

McKowen took Manning out of the game at that point with a six-point edge with 5:59 left in the first half, and this time Manning stayed on the bench for the rest of the stanza as his teammates took care of business without him. Manning, a 6-foot-4 senior, scored 16 points in the first half in about nine minutes of action.

"He's a sparkplug. Bryton (Heisler) was a sparkplug tonight, too," said McKowen.

Manning scored 16 of his 20 points in the first half, and Heisler scored 13 of his 17 points in the second half. Manning played like a man possessed in the first half, crashing the boards and doing all sorts of

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damage.

"I didn't have a very good game our last regular-season game against City High, so my confidence was really low," he said. "I've just been getting in the gym, getting shots up. And Coach has been getting my confidence up. I guess it showed out there."

Manning fouled out with 1:26 left in the game with Kennedy sitting on a 66-49 lead.

Kennedy zoomed to a 57-32 lead early in the fourth quarter against Cedar Falls. The Tigers rallied and pulled within 13 points, but that's as close as it got. Freshman Trey LaBeaux led Cedar Falls (15-8) with 16 points. Tra'Von Fagan had 15.

The Cougars know it will take a supreme effort to defeat Jordan Bohannon and the Linn-Mar Lions Tuesday night at the U.S. Cellular Center. Bohannon poured in 30 points for Linn-Mar Friday night against Waterloo West.

"It's a great opportunity," said Manning. "It's always good to play Linn-Mar again. We were kind of upset after that one loss against Linn-Mar."

The Washington Warriors will face top-ranked Iowa City West in the first game Tuesday at 6:30, with the Cougars and Lions waiting in the wings.

"It will be a big game," said Heisler. "I think there will be a lot of people and a lot of energy. It will be fun."

CEDAR FALLS (55); Fagan 7 1-1 15, Harrington 0 0-0 0, Green 2 2-2 6, Abbas 0 0-0 0, Jackson 3 2-2 9, Johnson 4 0-0 9, Alexander 0 0-0 0, LaBeaux 6 4-5 16, Forero 0 0-0 0, Fienup 0 0-0 0, Leisinger 0 0-0 0, Barney 0 0-0 0,

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Pierce 0 0-0 0. Totals 22 9-10 55.

KENNEDY (71): Daniels 2 2-3 7, Odom 0 0-0 0, Heisler 8 1-1 17, Murdock 3 0-0 8, Gardner 2 3-4 7, Bisenius 0 0-0 0, Diggins 2 2-2 6, Manning 7 5-9 20, Girling 0 0-0 0, Hall 0 0-0 0, Ross 0 0-0 0, Wall 0 0-0 0, Techau 1 0-0 2, Eberle 0 0-0 0, Brewster 1 2-3 4. Totals 26 15-22 71.

Halftime - Kennedy 35, Cedar Falls 22. 3-point goals - Cedar Falls 2 (Jackson 1, Johnson 1), Kennedy 4 (Murdock 2, Daniels 1, Manning 1).