

No. 7 Cougars top No. 15 Warriors

Written by Jim Ecker

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Their No. 1 ranking is only a fond memory now, but the Cedar Rapids Kennedy girls basketball team is still enjoying one of the best seasons in school history despite losing a pair of games recently.

The Cougars added another victory to their impressive resume Friday night when they knocked off 15th-ranked Washington, 64-58, in a foul-plagued Mississippi Valley Conference game at Kennedy.

The Cougars have dropped from No. 1 to No. 7 in the Class 5A rankings following losses to Cedar Falls and Iowa City West, two MVC opponents that are ranked by the IGHSAU as well, but they are still a dangerous club at 16-3 overall and 9-2 in the league.

"It's been a solid year for us," Kennedy coach Tony Vis said. "We have to try and peak here the last couple of weeks going into the tournament."

Lela Sellers led a balanced attack for the Cougars with 20 points and more good work off the defensive backboards. Sydney Hayden scored 13 points, Hailey Dolphin had 12 points and Ashley Hamilton came off the bench to pop in 11.

Sellers and Hayden sometimes score 60 to 70 percent of Kennedy's points, but Vis likes it

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better when the wealth is spread around.

"When we put three or four kids in double figures we're really hard to guard," he remarked. "If we can get three or four kids in double figures we're a lot more challenging to defend."

Washington has the ability to press opponents into submission with a variety of full-court defenses that can turn turnovers into easy buckets, but Kennedy took care of the ball Friday and limited its mistakes. The Warriors had to earn most of their points the old-fashioned way and they also had to deal with severe foul problems.

Jessi Puk fouled out with 7 minutes, 24 seconds left in the game and Vanessa Eniola collected her fifth foul with 5:37 to go. In addition, star point guard Joniqua Clark picked up her third foul in the second quarter and was called for her fourth foul with 5:09 left in the third quarter and sat down for an extended stretch again.



Clark, who leads Class 5A in steals, was rarely able to perform her magic against the Cougars. The Warriors also missed her leadership and ball handling when she was on the bench.

"She's obviously one of the top point guards in the state," noted Coach Frank Howell.

Vis liked the way his club played under control and made smart plays against Washington's

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press, for the most part.

"They can destroy people," he said. "I know the run they went on against Jefferson at Jefferson a few games back. I thought our kids played with good poise."

The officials called 41 fouls in the 32-minute game, including 24 against Washington. The Cougars ran into foul problems themselves, but nothing as severe as what the Warriors had to face.

Clark gave Washington a 35-34 lead with a 3-pointer early in the third period. Linden Runels scored inside to give Kennedy a 36-35 advantage, then Clark picked up her fourth foul a few seconds later and left the game.

Kennedy led 39-37 with about three minutes left in the third stanza, but the Cougars pounced on the Warriors from there with Clark on the bench. The Cougars went on an 11-1 run to grab a 50-38 lead late in the period.

Clark returned for the fourth quarter with her club trailing 50-40. The Warriors made a few mild surges, but never got closer than six points again.

Anne Visser scored 14 points for Washington (12-7, 6-5). Clark finished with 12 points and Jayla Johnson had 11.

WASHINGTON (58): Clark 5 1-3 12, Carey 0 0-0 0, Visser 5 1-4 14, V.Eniola 3 2-3 8, O'Donnell 0 0-0 0, M.Hoeger 0 0-0 0, Bruner 3 0-0 6, Puk 1 1-2 3, Riley 0 0-0 0, Mia 1 2-2 4, Johnson 4 3-4 11. Totals 22 10-18 58.

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KENNEDY (64): Langhurst 2 2-6 6, Hamilton 4 0-0 11, Hayden 4 3-5 13, Sellers 6 7-9 20, Vaske 0 0-2 0, Hellweg 0 0-0 0, Dolphin 4 4-5 12, Runels 1 0-0 2, Meier 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 16-27 64.

Halftime - Kennedy 34, Washington 28. 3-point goals - Washington 4 (Visser 3, Clark 1), Kennedy 6 (Hamilton 3, Hayden 2, Sellers 1).