

Cougars, Indians ready for state volleyball

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kennedy Cougars and Marion Indians face completely different challenges in the opening round of the state volleyball tournament Tuesday.

Kennedy knows all about Cedar Falls, its opponent in the first round, from their wars in the Mississippi Valley Conference and tournaments around eastern Iowa.

Marion, however, does not know a whole lot about Council Bluffs Lewis Central, its first-round opponent, because the two schools are located so far apart and rarely see each other.

The Cougars know their opponents on the other side of the net by their first names. The Indians know their opponents by their uniform numbers, which should make for an interesting dynamic when the tournament begins at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Kennedy (29-9) faces Cedar Falls (36-4) at 2 p.m. Tuesday on Court 2 in Class 5A. Marion (31-8) meets Lewis Central (32-5) at 6 p.m. Tuesday on Court 1 in Class 4A.

Kennedy is ranked No. 9 in Class 5A and Cedar Falls is ranked No. 3, so that makes the Cougars a slight underdog. Cedar Falls owned a 2-1 edge over Kennedy during the regular season, but the Cougars swept the Tigers in their only MVC match en route to a conference regular-season title. Cedar Falls beat Kennedy twice at the Osage tournament.

Marion is ranked No. 4 in Class 4A and Lewis Central is ranked No. 6, so that makes the Indians a slight favorite, but it's hard to predict what's going to happen on the big stage under

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bright lights.



The Class 5A tournament is loaded with top-ranked Dowling, No. 2 Bettendorf and No. 3 Cedar Falls, along with No. 5 Johnston, No. 7 Ankeny Centennial, No. 9 Kennedy, No. 11 Iowa City West and No. 12 Dubuque Hempstead.

The Class 4A tournament is stacked as well with top-ranked West Delaware, No. 2 Harlan, No. 3 Waverly-Shell Rock and No. 4 Marion, along with No. 6 Lewis Central, No. 8 Bishop Heelan, No. 10 Pella and No. 14 Western Dubuque.

Marion lost to West Delaware in the semifinals of the state tournament last year and the two Wamac Conference powers are seeded to meet in the semifinals again this year, providing they survive their opening-round tests Tuesday. West Delaware defeated Marion in the championship match of the Wamac Conference tournament this season in two tight sets.

Kennedy reached the state tournament for the first time since 2011 after losing in the regional finals for three straight years. The Cougars have a talented club with five future Division I athletes on the squad, a rare attribute for a high school team.

The Cougars have four players who have committed to D-I schools in volleyball with Brinley Milbrath (Northern Illinois), Macy Anderson (Nebraska-Omaha), Paige Franck (Iowa) and Anna Fluent (Loyola of Chicago). In addition, Tianna Drahm has committed to the University of Northern Iowa for softball.

This is the 25th straight year that the state volleyball tournament has been held in Cedar Rapids, including two years at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena when the U.S. Cellular Center was closed for repairs.

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The final two rounds of the Class 4A and Class 5A brackets are set for Thursday and Friday.

OPENING ROUND MATCHES

Class 5A

Noon - Dowling vs Dubuque Hempstead, Court 1

Noon - Bettendorf vs Iowa City West, Court 2

2 p.m. - Johnston vs Ankeny Centennial, Court 1

2 p.m. - Cedar Falls vs Kennedy, Court 2

CLASS 4A

4 p.m. - West Delaware vs Western Dubuque, Court 1

4 p.m. - Harlan vs Pella, Court 2

6 p.m. - Marion vs Lewis Central, Court 1

6 p.m. - Waverly-Shell Rock vs Bishop Heelan, Court 2