

Prairie Hawks hold off J-Hawks

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The Prairie boys escaped an inspired bunch from Jefferson by the skin of their teeth Monday night in opening-round play of the Class 4A substate boys basketball tournament.

And now the Hawks get a second crack at top-ranked and undefeated Iowa City West Friday night on the Trojans' home floor.

"It'll be a tall task," acknowledged even-keel Prairie Coach Jeremy Rickertsen in the home team locker room after Monday's 60-51 nail-biter against Jefferson. "But it's like we stressed to the guys: You gotta believe.

"If you don't believe we can beat them, don't get on the bus."

Jefferson Coach Brandon Horman had a similar message beforehand for his hard-luck J-Hawks. And they came within a couple of missed shots toward the tail-end of winning just their second game of a disappointing season.

"We were down by 10 but came all the way back," said Horman of the late surge that brought his team as close as 53-51 with 2:50 to go. "We just couldn't get over the hump, and that's been the story of our season.

"But as tough as things have been, these kids have not quit. A lot of teams would have thrown in it. But they're fighters."

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The J-Hawks (1-21) came out with fire in their eyes against a Prairie squad (9-13) that defeated them by 21 points three weeks ago.

With four 3-pointers, two of them by high scorer Adam Van Oort, Jefferson charged out to a 18-9 first quarter lead.



The Prairie Hawks rallied back with four long balls of their in the second quarter, with Coen Brown draining a pair, and knotted the halftime score at 32-all. Coming off the bench for a change, sophomore Max Smith Drahos was a catalyst in the comeback with 10 points on a variety of drives to the hoop.

"Last time against Jeff I made some threes," said Smith Drahos. "This time I was looking for some gaps and maybe draw some fouls. I was trying to give us some energy."

Prairie turned up the heat on defense coming out of the halftime break.

The J-Hawks, who made only six turnovers in the first half, suddenly came down with a bad case of butterfingers. Scoring off steals, the Hawks closed the third quarter with a 14-3 run to go ahead by 10.

"I wasn't real happy with our defense in the first half," said Rickertsen. "But give Jeff credit. I thought (Bryce) Cardis and Van Oort really played well. But I thought Jeff got a little flustered and we were able to get some steals."

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Senior Mitch Lorenz was also key off the bench for Prairie, nailing two 3-balls in a row at the end of the quarter. He later scored on a nifty dippy-do baseline drive to put Prairie up 55-51 with 1:30 left in the game.

"I didn't want this to be my last game," said Lorenz, one of eight seniors. "My teammates on the bench were telling me to shoot, so I pulled off the first three. And when I made the first one, I pulled off another one."

Jefferson had little hope other than to foul in the final seconds and Prairie took advantage to widen the margin.

Symbolic of the J-Hawks' struggle, leading scorer Tyler Koningsmark was held to nine hard-fought points and hurt his shoulder making a last-ditch foul with 17 seconds left.

Van Oort led Jefferson with 19 points, while Cardis had 14 on a series of drives down the lane.

Smith Drahos also finished with 19 points and Lorenz had 10. In his best effort of the season, senior big man Bryce Meeker chipped in with eight points for Prairie.

JEFFERSON (51): Cardis 4 6-6 14, Wiederin 0 0-0 0, Van Oort 7 3-4 19, Koningsmark 3 3-3 9, Furrow 2 0-0 5, Webb 0 0-0 0, Szabo 0 0-0 0, Kramer 1 1-24, Hunt 0 0-0 0, Green 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 13-15 51.

PRAIRIE (60): Clark 2 0-0 4, Fisher 1 4-5 7, Rima 1 1-1 3, Meeker 4 0-0 8, Boldt 1 1-2 3, Drahos 7 3-5 19, Lorenz 4 0-0 10, Schrader 0 0-0 0. Totals: 22 9-13 60.

Halftime – Jefferson 32, Prairie 32. 3-point goals – Jefferson 4 (Van Oort 2, Kramer 1, Furrow 1), Prairie 7 (Drahos 2, Lorenz 2, Brown 2, Fisher 1).

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