

Winless Cougars can still make playoffs

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kennedy Cougars have stumbled to an 0-6 record this season with a couple of near-misses and blown leads along the way, but all is not lost in Cougar Town.

Kennedy actually has a decent shot at making the Class 4A playoffs with victories over the Waterloo schools this month. You can thank - or blame - the Iowa High School Athletic Association and district football for that.

Four of the six teams in Kennedy's district will make the playoffs. Cedar Falls and Linn-Mar, which meet in a showdown Friday night, are in good shape with 2-0 district records. Jefferson looks like a good bet at 1-1, which leaves one more playoff berth up for grabs.

Kennedy could grab that spot by beating Waterloo East in Waterloo this Friday night and topping Waterloo West in the last game of the regular season Oct. 24 at Kingston. Under that scenario, the Cougars can lose at Cedar Falls Oct. 17.

Yes, that's right. Kennedy can make the playoffs this year with a 2-7 overall record.

Lots of people saw this coming when the IHSAA put everybody into districts this year. Not with Kennedy, necessarily, but somebody was bound to make the playoffs with an ugly record.

Kennedy is not a bad team, but the Cougars have a bad record. They lost to Iowa City West when the Trojans threw a touchdown pass on 4th-and-15 in the final seconds and they lost to Jefferson when they missed a chip-shot field goal on the final play of the fourth quarter.

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Kennedy jumped to a 14-0 lead against Linn-Mar Friday, but faltered and lost 29-14.

The Cougars should beat Waterloo East this Friday and they'll be underdogs against Cedar Falls in the UNI-Dome next week. They means Kennedy could enter the final game of the regular season with a 1-7 record with a playoff berth on the line against Waterloo West, which rolled by Waterloo East 42-6 Friday for its first district victory.

Kennedy has some of the ingredients for a good team, so they could do some unexpected damage in the playoffs even with their poor record. The next few weeks will be interesting.

There are 46 teams in Class 4A this year. There are six districts with six teams apiece, and two districts with five teams apiece. In all cases, the top four teams in each district will make the playoffs for a 32-team field.

The Washington Warriors are rolling along with a 6-0 record after dumping Ottumwa, 40-2, Friday night to keep their No. 1 spot in the Class 4A rankings by the Des Moines Register.

The Warriors have a powerful team with lots of size, speed and strength, but Washington's passing attack has been a little suspect this season and it could come back to haunt them in the playoffs if they face an opponent that's just as big and strong.

Quarterback Reid Snitker has completed only 25 of 60 passes for 422 yards and seven touchdowns in six games. He hasn't had to do more than that,

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thanks to Washington's strong running game and defense, but the playoffs could be another story against Bettendorf or any of the good clubs from the Des Moines area.

Snitker had a good year throwing the ball last year, especially when the Warriors upset Xavier, and he's got plenty of good receivers. For some reason, the passing game has not clicked this season.

The Xavier Saints are another team that might need to get its passing game in gear for the playoffs. Quarterback Bryce Schulte went 0-for-7 in the passing department when the Saints lost to Western Dubuque, 7-6, Friday night at home.

It was a tough night to throw the ball - cold and windy - but the Western Dubuque quarterback completed his share of passes in the same weather. In fairness to Schulte, he threw some catchable balls that were hauled in by his receivers.

The Saints have won their share of games with their special teams, but they botched a PAT against Western Dubuque, missed a field goal and had a punt return for a touchdown nullified by a penalty.

Schulte, a sophomore, has been spoon-fed a little this season and has thrown for only 361 yards, but it might be time to crank it up.