

O'Donnell helps Wash top No. 10 Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

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There is life after Dani Franklin and Aleena Hobbs.

The Washington Warriors proved that Tuesday night with a convincing 53-46 victory over 10th-ranked Kennedy in a Mississippi Valley Conference girls basketball game at Kennedy.

Franklin and Hobbs enjoyed prolific careers for the Warriors before heading to college this year, with Franklin at Valparaiso University and Hobbs practically across the street at Coe, but the Warriors still have some arrows in their quiver.

Kandis O'Donnell led Washington with 13 points and six assists Tuesday in their best win of the year.

"I feel very excited," said O'Donnell, a 5-foot-11 senior. "I couldn't be more proud of our team.

"We were really excited to get to this game. It's a great game to play. We came out and we played tremendous as a team. We came together."

Washington raised its records to 4-3 overall and 2-3 in conference games. Kennedy fell to 5-2 overall and 3-2 in MVC contests with its second setback at home.

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"It's by far at this point of the season our biggest win," said Washington Coach Frank Howell. "Our best collective focus and our best collective effort by far.

"It just shows us what we're capable of doing," he said. "This is one of the best teams on our schedule. That makes us feel psychologically that we can compete with just about anybody now."

The Warriors held Kennedy star Lela Sellers to 10 points, including just one point in the second half on a free throw in the fourth quarter.

Stephanie Botkin, Kennedy's other top scorer, fouled out with 2:05 left in the game with 11 points.

Washington paid extra attention to Sellers and Botkin, holding them to a total of six field goals.

"One of the things we talked about before the game was, make the unknown beat you," said Howell. "Everybody knows who Sellers is and everybody knows who Botkin is.

"They're going to get their points and they're going to play a good game, but don't let them kill you. I think we were successful at that."

Kennedy shot poorly from the field and made only one 3-pointer in 16 attempts.

O'Donnell has moved comfortably into a new role with the Warriors this season with Franklin and Hobbs in college.

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"I just try to be a leader," she said. "I go as hard as I can. If I'm not scoring anything, I try to bring some energy to our team."

"The girls kind of come to me for advice and stuff. It means a lot to me," she said. "I can't be happier when they come to me with something they need or have questions. I always try to be there for them."

O'Donnell has not fully recovered from a knee injury suffered earlier in her career, but this is her final season and she's determined to play.

"It's getting there," she remarked. "It's not quite 100 percent healed, but I'm not going to be on the bench."

Howell treasures O'Donnell's contributions to the squad.

"She really wants this," he said. "That's the big thing: How motivated is somebody to play? I've never questioned her motivation coming into her senior year."

"She did a great job tonight of asserting herself in the low post," he said. "The kids did a good job of getting her the ball, too. She made some great post moves and she made some great passes, too."

Washington jumped to a pair of 12-point leads in the second quarter, but Kennedy rallied and pulled within 28-26 at intermission.

Botkin gave the Cougars a 31-30 lead with two free throws in the third quarter, but Courtney Squires scored for Washington and the Warriors never trailed again.

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The cold-shooting Cougars scored only one point in the first 6 minutes, 50 seconds of the fourth quarter and fell behind 47-38.

Joniqua Clark and Squires scored eight points apiece for Washington.

Alexandra Semrau finished with seven points.

Katelyn Dye scored 10 points for Kennedy.

WASHINGTON (53): Clark 1 5-6 8, Semrau 3 0-2 7, Visser 1 2-4 5, Corey 1 0-0 2, B. Hoeger 1 0-0 3, Hartman 1 0-0 2, Squires 3 2-3 8, Arrington 0 0-0 0, Bruner 1 0-0 2, Puk 0 1-3 1, O'Donnell 5 3-3 13, Oler 0 0-2 0, Pledge-Johnson 1 0-0 2, Cullen 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 13-23 53.

KENNEDY (46): Dye 3 4-5 10, Hamilton 1 0-0 2, Hayden 2 1-2 5, Sellers 2 6-10 10, A. Hellweg 1 1-3 3, Runels 1 0-0 3, Dolphin 1 0-1 2, Botkin 4 3-4 11. Totals 15 15-25 46.

Halftime - Washington 28, Kennedy 26. 3-point goals - Washington 3 (Clark 1, Semrau 1, Visser 1), Kennedy 1 (Runels 1). Fouled out - Dye, Hamilton, Botkin.