

Cougars fall short against No. 1 Trojans

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kennedy Cougars slowed Iowa City West down a little, got them in foul trouble and made them sweat at the Kennedy gym Friday night.

The top-ranked Trojans won anyway, 64-54, with a balanced attack that saw all five starters score in double figures.

Coach Steve Bergman's club has won three Class 4A state titles in a row and could be heading for a fourth this season. The Trojans boast a phenomenal record of 90-3 the past four years and are standing at 15-0 this season and 11-0 in the Mississippi Valley Conference.

Kennedy (10-5, 7-3) pulled within 45-42 early in the fourth quarter and drew within 54-50 midway through the stanza, but the smaller Cougars were not able to finish the job.

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"Too many lows. That's kind of been the story of our season," said Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen.

"There's times every single game where we play the way we feel we can play, but then we have too many down times. You can't play 16-minute games. I don't care who you're playing.

"I felt like we played a 16-minute game tonight."

The Cougars had a slow start and a slow finish, helping Iowa City West escape with the victory.

"We're happy to get out of here," said Bergman. "I don't think we played awful, but I don't think we played great. I'm sure they feel they left a few points out there, too.

"It's a tough place to play," he said. "They do some unique things. They change defenses a lot."

All five Iowa City West starters scored 13 or 11 points. Tanner Lohaus and Devontae Lane had 13 apiece, while Wali Parks, Connor McCaffery and David DiLeo had 11 each.

Kennedy could not match that. Zach Daniels scored 15, Brendon Manning had 11 and Bryton

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Heisler finished with 10 points.



The Cougars love to fire 3-pointers, but Iowa City West made it tough to find open looks all night with its tight defense. Kennedy fared better when it attacked the basket, especially after four Iowa City West players picked up their third foul in the third quarter.

"You can't pass it around the perimeter and shoot over them, because they're six inches taller than us across the board," said McKowen, exaggerating only slightly. "But when you attack them and you get their backs turned, then you're OK. Then you can get open looks and clean looks."

Kennedy made only four 3-pointers, about half its average.

Iowa City West opened a 37-25 lead in the third quarter, but Kennedy pulled within 43-37 entering the fourth quarter. Daniels hit a 3-pointer to get the Cougars within 45-42, but DiLeo quickly responded with a triple for the Trojans to make it 48-42.

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Daniels hit a basket to make it 54-50 and an upset appeared possible.

"We felt like we were in a good spot," said McKowen. "They were breathing hard and we were rotating through at that time, so we were continuing to stay fresh."

The Trojans caught their breath, however.

Lane hit two free throws to make it 59-52, McCaffery cashed two more to make it 61-52 and Parks hit a follow shot to make it 63-52 with only 42 seconds remaining.

The Trojans hurt Kennedy on put-backs and outscored the Cougars at the foul line, 18-12.

"I felt like we didn't play our best," said Daniels. "We still had a shot at the end of the game to win it, but we weren't in sync throughout the night.

"They're pretty lanky," he said. "They were switching (on defense), so it was tough to get open 3's. We had to go back-door more than we usually do."

McKowen saluted Iowa City West.

"Solid basketball minds," he remarked. "They play the game 12 months a year, for the most part. They don't have many multi-sport athletes. That gets them ahead to start the game and they continue to develop.

"They don't beat themselves," said McKowen. "We beat ourselves a lot tonight. That's something we're working on."

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IOWA CITY WEST (64): Parks 4 3-4 11, Henderson 1 3-4 5, Lane 3 7-9 13, Lohaus 6 1-1 13, Majors 0 0-0 0, McCaffery 3 4-6 11, Barnes 0 0-0 0, DiLeo 5 0-0 11. Totals 22 18-24 64.

KENNEDY (54): Daniels 3 7-8 15, Heisler 4 2-2 10, Murdock 2 0-0 4, Gardner 1 1-2 3, Diggins 2 2-2 7, Manning 5 0-0 11, Girling 0 0-0 0, Techau 0 0-0 0, Brewster 2 0-0 4. Totals 19 12-14 54.

Halftime - Iowa City West 30, Kennedy 22. 3-point goals - Iowa City West 2 (McCaffery 1, DiLeo 1), Kennedy 4 (Daniels 2, Diggins 1, Manning 1).