

Prairie girls bounce J-Hawks

Written by Tom Fruehling

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In his second season with the vastly improved Prairie girls basketball team, Josh Bentley may have found the secret of coaching.

"When the shots are falling, it makes the coach look good," he said Tuesday night after his near-flawless crew surprisingly throttled Jefferson, 57-31, at Prairie.

And it was no fluke that Prairie had a hot shooting night by hitting 22 of 50 (44 percent), according to star senior guard Olivia Usher.

"Defensively, we really came out ready to play," she said. "When we're playing good defense, it makes our offense work a lot better."

In an almost perfect performance, Usher led the Hawks with 19 points, with eight of them coming in a 20-2 Prairie run after the score was tied 9-9.

The J-Hawks, who shot just nine for 44 for the night (20.1 percent), managed just four points in the second quarter and five in the third.

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"You're not going to win many games shooting like that," Jefferson coach Jason Edwards said. "Obviously, we did not shoot the ball well. But we need to do a better job knowing how to respond when the shots aren't going in."

Prairie out-rebounded Jefferson, 38-26, and in Edwards' view out-hustled his own much-improved outfit.

"On defense, I thought they played with more energy than we did," he remarked. "And we seemed to lose our confidence when things weren't going our way, when their shots were falling and we were just taking the ball out of the net."

Bentley, on the other hand, couldn't have more pleased with his team's effort. Even from 3-point range, the shooting was effective at 36 percent (five out of 14). The cold-as-ice J-Hawks, meanwhile, were just one for 15.



But it was the defense that most pleased the Prairie coach.

"The girls just stepped up, all 14 of them," he said. "We've focused on that end of the court. And tonight they left everything they had out there on the floor."

After a dismal 4-18 campaign in his rookie year, Bentley's veteran team is already 3-2 (1-2

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MVC) with a win last week over Class 4A highly ranked Marion and a narrow two-point loss to Cedar Falls.

Despite Tuesday night's stumble, prospects are also looking up for Jefferson with a 3-3 mark. After a 5-3 start last season, the J-Hawks finished 8-15.

They have more height this year, though, and several promising newcomers who provide team depth for a change.

"We need to play with consistency night after night," said Edwards. "But we're a better team than we were tonight."

JEFFERSON (31): Kitterman 0 3-6 3, Guy 2 2-3 6, Wise 2 1-25, Dighton 2 1-3 6, Emily Oler 0 1-2 1, Donner 2 3-3 6, Melton 1 1-2 3, Erica Oler 0 0-0 0, Thurmond 0 0-0 0, Baxter 0 0-0 0, O'Brien 0 0-2 0. Totals 9 12-23 31.

PRAIRIE (57): Altenhofen 2 0-0 6, Schmitt 1 1-1 2, Usher 7 4-5 19, Wagemester 3 0-0 6, Moenk 0 0-0 0, Sanders 0 0-0 0, Lampe 0 0-0 0, Adams 1 1-3 3, Stebral 1 0-0 3, Shreeves 0 0-0 0, Kuch 2 0-0 5, Stoffer 3 2-6 8, Person 2 0-0 4. Totals 22 8-15 57.

Halftime – Prairie 33, Jefferson 13. 3-point goals – Jefferson 1 (Dighton 1), Prairie 5 (Altenhofen 2, Usher 1, Kuch 1, Stebral 1).