

No. 4 Cougars, No. 9 Lions on collision course

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 27 December 2015 16:52 - Last Updated Sunday, 27 December 2015 18:01



If you like girls basketball, you might want to circle Tuesday, Jan. 5 on your calendar as a "must see" game for the New Year.

The Kennedy Cougars will host the Linn-Mar Lions that night at 7:30 in a showdown for early bragging rights in the Metro area. Kennedy is ranked No. 4 in Class 5A with a 9-1 record, while Linn-Mar is ranked No. 9 in Class 5A with a 6-1 mark.

The Cougars feature a strong 1-2 punch with Lela Sellers and sharpshooter Sydney Hayden, while the Lions counter with a strong 1-2 punch of their own with Amanda Ollinger and Kamryn Finley.

All four of those athletes will play Division I sports in college. Sellers has signed with Liberty University for basketball, Hayden is headed to the University of Northern Iowa for soccer, Ollinger has signed with Iowa for basketball and Finley, just a sophomore, already has basketball offers from Northern Iowa and Drake.

Ollinger leads the Metro in scoring and ranks third in rebounding, while Sellers leads the Metro in rebounding and ranks second in scoring.

Kennedy and Linn-Mar complement their top players with a solid supporting cast, so it should be a fun night of basketball as Kennedy Coach Tony Vis and Linn-Mar Coach Jaime Brandt match wits.

The Cougars and Lions both won 16 games last season and both teams have an excellent

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chance of surpassing that victory total this year. They are not alone, however.

The Prairie Hawks, who finished 4-18 last year, have taken a big step forward and are already 4-4 this season. The Jefferson J-Hawks, who finished 8-15 last season after Ollinger transferred to Linn-Mar at mid-season, have gotten off to a 5-4 start and appear to be much improved.

The Marion Indians, ranked No. 5 in Class 4A, compiled a 17-6 record last season and have a chance to eclipse that number with a 6-2 start. The Washington Warriors went 13-9 last year and are sitting at 5-4 entering 2016 and could catch fire.

The Xavier Saints (4-5) will have to hustle to duplicate last year's 17-7 mark. Cedar Valley Christian (3-6) has shown there's life after Shelby Hembera, but the Huskies will need five more wins to reach last year's 8-14 record.

It will be fun to see how the season unfolds and to see which players deserve to make the All-Metro squad.