

Calm, collected Cougars conquer Hempstead

Written by Sher Jasperse

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Dubuque Hempstead held the lead midway through the first period, regained it in the second, and outscored Kennedy in the fourth.

But the Cougars kept their heads and rode balanced scoring to a 50-41 victory over the Mustangs Tuesday night at home.

It wasn't polished, but it showcased the potential of a young team learning to spread the wealth.

Both teams played tough defense around the basket and struggled to find quality shots, making for a messy, evenly played, first half. Cougar senior Courtney Strait scored 11 points in the first two periods to nudge her team ahead 24-20 at the break.

Held to three points in the second half, she found another way to lead her team.

"They kind of shut me down in the second half, so my role switched from scorer to being the coach on the court and making sure the players stay calm and letting them know it's okay to make mistakes and we've just got to make it back on defense."

Her teammates came through with 23 second-half points, countering a furious effort by the Mustang forward Brittani Graves, who caught fire in the second half to score 16 points. She had little help, as the rest of her team managed only one field goal and three free throws after the break.

The Cougars' unselfish play made the difference, said Strait.

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"We've always emphasized that. It doesn't matter who scores as long as you get the job done. We kept passing the ball around and we kept moving it and getting it to the right person and that's what helped to run the clock."

Kennedy's bench outscored the Mustang reserves 19-5, led by sophomore Paige Hendrickson with 10 points.

"We didn't shoot free throws real well tonight and we didn't make a lot of lay-ups," said Kennedy Coach Dennis Roloff. "To still win the game says a lot for our team. We just wanted to move the ball, get everybody involved and take good shots."

The Mustangs' Graves led all scorers with 20 points.

Kennedy (2-1, 3-1) aims for its third victory in a row in a home contest against Xavier on Friday night. Hempstead (0-3, 2-3) plays at Waterloo West.

DUBUQUE HEMPSTEAD (41): Van Cleve 2 4-8 8, Doty 0 0-1 0, Cox 0 0-0 0, Graves 6 8-12 20, Koerperich 3 2-2 8, Dolan 2 1-2 5, Tauke 0 0-2 0, Lattner 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 15-27 41.

KENNEDY (50): Meier 1 2-2 5, Strait 5 3-5 14, Simmons 2 0-0 4, Johnson 0 0-1 0, Botkin 4 0-0 8, Hendrickson 5 0-2 10, Holmes 1 0-2 2, Wagner 3 1-4 7, Zinser 0 0-0 0, Davis 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 6-16 50.

Halftime -- Kennedy 24, Dubuque Hempstead 20. 3-point goals -- Kennedy 2 (Meier, Strait), Dubuque Hempstead 0. Fouled out -- Botkin.