

Cougars rally late to beat Xavier boys

Written by Don Taylor

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Kennedy erased a six-point Xavier lead in the final four minutes of the game and the 10th-ranked Cougars beat the Saints, 54-45, Friday night in a Mississippi Valley Conference boys basketball game at Xavier.

Josh Jahlas knocked down an 8-foot jumper and made 6-of-6 free throws down the stretch as Kennedy used solid ball pressure to force the Saints into crucial turnovers.

"We work on clutch free throws in every practice every day," said Jahlas, who spent much of the third quarter on the bench because of his own foul trouble. "Despite our foul problems, we stayed calm and played defense. When the free throws came, I just stepped up and shot them."

"Jahlas is our glue," said Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana. He's just a mentally tough kid who gives us everything he's got. Those free throws were critical."

Trevor Heitland led Kennedy (3-0, 1-0) with 11 points and Cody Bell and Jahlas put up 10 apiece. In the first half the Cougars held the Saints without a field goal for a nine-minute stretch.

Foul trouble became an issue for Kennedy in the second period and Xavier's Mack Mattke warmed up for nine first half points to pull the Saints within four points at halftime.

"We began the game playing good defense," explained Heitland, "but they are a big team that kept working back into the game. This game was a good experience for us."

"When we began to sub, we were putting young kids in there that don't have a lot of varsity experience," said Fontana. "Then we had to play some zone because of our fouls and we just

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didn't match up too well some of the time. In the end, our defense won the game and our seniors stepped up down the stretch."

Xavier (0-3, 0-1) was led in scoring by Ben McDermott with 10 points. Mattke had nine.

"We did what we need to do to win the game," said Xavier Coach Matt Jenkins. "We just couldn't sustain it. Our defense did a pretty good job, but Kennedy's ball pressure was just too much for us in the last four minutes."

Kennedy's net game is Tuesday at Dubuque Senior. Xavier plays at West Des Moines Dowling on Saturday.

KENNEDY (54): Hayden 2 0-0 6, Heitland 4 2-6 11, Jahlas 2 6-6 10, Bell 3 2-2 10, Christians 3 3-5 9, Struss 4 0-0 8, Martin 0 0-0 0, Carter 0 0-0 0, Fergus 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 13-19 54.

XAVIER (45): Sampson 2 1-1 7, McDermott 3 2-2 10, Hosch 3 0-0 6, Valentine 0 0-0 0, Mattke 3 2-2 9, Clasen 2 3-4 8, Nelson 2 1-2 5, Ropp 0 0-0 0, Frazier 0 0-0 0. Totals 15 10-11 45.

Halftime — Kennedy 19 Xavier 15. 3-point goals — Kennedy 5 (Heitland 1, Hayden 2, Bell 2) Xavier 5 (Sampson 2, McDermott 2, Mattke 1) Fouled out -- None.