

## Fontana unhappy with Kennedy's loss

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Kennedy boys basketball team enjoyed a 20-0 run during the second half against Dubuque Wahlert Tuesday night, but then the Cougars ran out of luck.

Trevor Heitland missed a 3-pointer with one second remaining and Kennedy began the new year with a 52-51 loss to the Golden Eagles in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Kennedy.

The Cougars (5-2, 3-2) fell behind by 19 points during the first half and trailed by 15 markers at intermission against a team that was missing two starters and had nobody taller than 6-foot-2.

"We just didn't follow our game plan the first half," Coach Bob Fontana remarked. "What was also sickening to me was watching us get killed on the boards by a much smaller team.

"We had no senior leadership out there, and then the guys off the bench did not provide us with anything. So at halftime we talked about what we weren't doing, because there wasn't much to talk about what we were doing right."

Fontana wanted his players to attack Wahlert's zone by pounding the ball into 6-foot-7 center Elliott Christians, who enjoyed a five-inch advantage over the tallest Golden Eagle, but that rarely worked. Kennedy settled for 3-pointers and missed 12 of 14 from long range in the first

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half.

Fontana also wanted his players to focus their defense on Wahlert stars Riley McCarron and Jake May, but McCarron torched the Cougars for 20 points in the first half alone.

Kennedy trailed 39-22 early in the third quarter when things started popping for the Cougars. Christians hit a pair of free throws and Heitland scored seven straight points with two layups and a 3-pointer, and suddenly it was 39-31.

Ben Struss popped in a jumper, Christians scored inside, Cody Bell made a layup and Heitland tied the game 39-39 with a stop-and-pop jumper. McCarron missed a shot and Alex Hayden tossed in a 3-pointer to give Kennedy a 42-39 edge and finish the 20-0 spurt.

The Cougars used a halfcourt zone trap to force turnovers and get the tempo in their favor and also got hot from the field. "We had to force the issue," Fontana said. "What was frustrating, when we got the lead we relaxed."

May nailed a 3-pointer to snap the 20-0 hex and tie the game for Wahlert, 42-42, then he stuck a jumper at the buzzer to give the Golden Eagles a 44-42 edge after three quarters.

Patrick Martin tied the game for Kennedy, 44-44, but May hit a 3-pointer and added a free throw a few seconds later for a 48-44 advantage for the visitors.

Martin pulled the Cougars within 48-46 and Cody Bell gave Kennedy a 49-48 lead with a 3-ball from the corner with 1:10 left. May gave Wahlert a 50-49 lead with two free throws with 57.6 seconds to go.

Josh Jahlas gave Kennedy a 51-50 advantage with two free throws with 39.1 seconds remaining, but May scored inside with 15 seconds left to give Wahlert a 52-51 lead.

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Heitland missed the front end of a one-and-one with 9.2 seconds remaining, but May returned the favor by missing the front end of his one-and-one with 7.9 ticks left.

Kennedy called a timeout in front of its own bench with 4.1 seconds left, still trailing 52-51.

Bell had the assignment of tossing the ball inbounds. He found Heitland at the top of the key, but Heitland's 3-pointer from about 23 feet with one second left hit the rim and bounced off. Wahlert swatted the loose ball away from the basket and the horn sounded.

Fontana gave his team four options on the final play, including the pass to Heitland at the top of the key.

"He told Cody to throw it to the best option," Heitland explained. "And he said whoever does receive it has to take the shot and make a play, because there were only four seconds left. That's what I tried to do, but it didn't drop."

McCarron did not score in the second half after netting 20 by intermission, but May scored 15 points in the second half and finished with 19. Kennedy played tougher defense on McCarron in the second half, but the 5-foot-9 senior also got tired with the Golden Eagles missing two starters.

"He wore down," Wahlert Coach Tom English said.

English was happy to leave Kennedy with a hard-earned victory, especially after surrendering 20 straight points in the second half.

"That doesn't happen very often, does it?" he said of surviving a 20-0 drought. "It was a great win for us. We needed it."

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Wahlert raised its records to 4-3 overall and 4-0 in the MVC. The Golden Eagles played without Nate Burks (illness) and Nick Nemmers (broken wrist), taking 18 points out of their lineup. The Golden Eagles also lost Brady Williams, another starter, to a possible concussion with 1:36 left in the game.

Heitland led Kennedy with 15 points. Christians scored 13. The Cougars finished 6 of 25 on 3-pointers.

"We didn't deserve to win," Fontana said. "When you come out and play that way the first game back after break and don't show up to play in the first half and don't follow the game plan, you don't deserve to win. It shouldn't come down to that final play."

Kennedy hosts winless Washington on Friday night.

"We'll come back Friday and see what we're made of," Fontana said. "If not, I just told them, we'll start making some personnel changes, because I'm not going to watch what they did in the first half. I'd rather get beat with kids that want to play together."

WAHLERT (52): McCarron 8 0-2 20, Koenig 1 0-0 3, Williams 1 0-0 3, May 6 5-7 19, Heidesch 2 3-3 7, Tranel 0 0-2 0, Burgmeier 0 0-0 0, Krueger 0 0-0 0, Walker 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 8-14 52.

KENNEDY (51): Heitland 6 0-3 15, Hayden 2 0-0 6, Bell 3 0-0 7, Jahlas 1 2-2 4, Christians 4 5-6 13, Struss 1 0-0 2, Carter 0 0-0 0, Martin 2 0-0 4. Totals 19 7-11 51.

Halftime - Wahlert 34, Kennedy 19. 3-point goals - Wahlert 8 (McCarron 4, May 2, Koenig 1, Williams 1), Kennedy 6 (Heitland 3, Hayden 2, Bell 1).