

Strait, Cougars shoot down J-Hawks

Written by Jake Koolbeck

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Senior Courtney Strait, second in scoring in Class 4A, was at it again Friday as seventh ranked Kennedy whipped Jefferson, 70-35, in the opener of an intra-city girl/boy basketball doubleheader.

Strait led all scorers with 24 points in just over three quarters of play. She sat out all but a minute of the final quarter.

“She is a great shooter and we left her wide open,” Jefferson Coach Larry Niemeyer said. “If you leave her open she is going to hit shots.”

It was the second meeting between the crosstown rivals and things went about the same way as the last time, an 81-39 Kennedy win on Jan. 13.

“We were totally outplayed on offense and defense,” Niemeyer said. “They got whatever they wanted.”

The Cougars again took control from the start en route to a blowout win.

“Same thing,” Niemeyer said. “We missed some easy shots and free throws. We have to score early and we have some trouble with that.”

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With Jefferson leading 4-3, the Cougars went on a 22-4 run to close out the first quarter and take control of the game with a 25-8 lead. Strait led the way, going 4 of 5 from distance. She tossed in 14 points in the first quarter.

“I just focused on catching and shooting,” Strait said. “Once I got going it was just about keeping my stroke and muscle memory. I was open so I kept shooting.”

The second quarter didn’t go any better for Jefferson as Kennedy shut down J-Hawk leading scorer Maddie Koolbeck and held the J-Hawks to just seven attempted field goals.

“We were concerned with them getting on the basket side. We wanted to keep them in front and have backside help if they caught it inside,” Strait said about the defense on Koolbeck and other J-Hawk posts. “Last time we got beat on their cuts.”

“I definitely felt like I was getting bumped (underneath),” said Koolbeck, who finished with 16 points. “I didn’t do a good enough job going up strong though.”

The Cougars led 41-14 at halftime.

Kennedy slammed the door in the third quarter with a 15-2 run to start the second half and left

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no doubt that it was all Cougars on this night.

Kennedy exploited the J-Hawk zone with quick ball movement to work the ball inside for easy buckets.

Jefferson attempted to switch things up with a man to man defense, but it was too late. The Cougars were on a roll and stretched the lead to 38 by the end of the third.

"We focused on the 2-3 zone in particular at practice this week. We wanted to move the ball around quick," Strait said. "We were able to keep the ball moving and get people open."

The J-Hawks won the final quarter 10-7 when the Cougars emptied the bench to get everyone playing time.

Sophomore Paige Hendrickson joined Strait in double digits with 11.

Kennedy (12-8, 9-7) wraps up the regular season Saturday in a non-conference game at Marion.

Jefferson (8-13, 3-13) ended the regular season on a sour note. The J-Hawks start regionals on Wednesday when they host Marshalltown.

"We have to come ready to play as a team (against Marshalltown)," Koolbeck said. "Hopefully a good few days of practice will get us ready."

KENNEDY (70): Madi Meier 3 0-0 6, Courtney Strait 8 2-2 24, Kaylese Johnson 2 0-0 4, Paige Hendrickson 5 0-0 11, Stephanie Botkin 2 3-4 7, Jordan Holmes 3 0-0 7, Capria Davis 0 0-0 0, Mariah Simmons 0 0-0 0, Sarah Zinser 3 1-1 7, Taylor Wagner 2 0-0 4, Aryn Nelson 0 0-0 0,

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Taylor Sohn 0 0-0 0, Setsuna Yokota 0 0-0 0, Grace Reinhart 0 0-0 0. Totals 28 6-7 70.

JEFFERSON (35): Alleigha Church-Green 0 1-2 1, Maddy Blietz 2 1-3 5, Dani Stromert 2 2-2 6, Maddie Koolbeck 7 2-4 16, Kielely Brathwaite 3 1-2 7, Kylie Jonas 0 0-0 0, Hannah Towns 0 0-0 0, Molly Evans 0 0-0 0, Bethany Polansky 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 7-13 35.

Halftime – Kennedy 41, Jefferson 14. 3-point goals – Kennedy 8 (Strait 6, Hendrickson, Holmes) Jefferson 0. Total Fouls – Kennedy 14 Jefferson 10.