

## Kennedy versus Jefferson: It's a rivalry again

Written by Jim Ecker

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Inch by inch, step by step, Brian Webb has rebuilt the downtrodden Cedar Rapids Jefferson football program into a competitive Class 4A team that appears headed to the playoffs for the second straight year.

Along the way, Jefferson's annual game against Kennedy has become a rivalry again instead of a one-sided affair.

The J-Hawks (3-1) and fifth-ranked Cougars (4-0) meet again Friday night in the District 5 opener for both clubs at Kingston Stadium. It's always fun when both teams go into a game with a legitimate chance to win and that's certainly the case this time.

Jefferson stunned Kennedy, 27-24, in overtime last season in a "statement" game for the J-Hawks. It was Jefferson's first victory over the Cougars in 12 years and showed that Webb is serious about returning the J-Hawks to glory.

Kennedy kicked a field goal for a 24-21 lead in overtime, forcing Jefferson to respond or lose. The J-Hawks faced fourth down at the 2-yard line, where a chip-shot field goal would have tied the game and forced a second overtime.

Instead of making a safe decision, Webb went for broke and hit the jackpot when Jesse Furrow hit Valentino Green with a 2-yard touchdown pass for the victory. That set off a wild celebration by the J-Hawks and their fans.

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Webb sent a message to his team with his decision to go for the touchdown on fourth down.

"Guys, I wasn't going for the tie, I was going for the win!," he exclaimed. "I'm here to win games."

Webb inherited a struggling program when he became Jefferson's head coach in 2012. He arrived with a plan, first revealed when he met with the players and Jefferson parents for the first time, and it revolved around discipline and being accountable.

Jefferson snapped a 24-game losing streak his first year in town and finished 1-8 overall. The J-Hawks went 1-8 again in 2013, then raised their mark to 4-6 last season and made the playoffs.

They gave Washington a tough game in the opener this year before falling, 27-14, then have looked good in victories over Prairie (55-37), Davenport North (35-6) and Davenport West (62-21). Now comes Kennedy in a rematch of last year's classic.

The Cougars whipped the J-Hawks, 44-0, in Webb's first year. The Cougars held the upper hand again in 2013, but the J-Hawks closed the gap to 35-14. Then came Jefferson's 27-24 triumph last year.

Kennedy has earned its No. 5 spot in the Des Moines Register poll with victories over Washington, Iowa City West, North Scott and Pleasant Valley. The Cougars deserve to be favorites Friday night, but that's probably the way Jefferson wants it.

Kennedy has some major weapons with Tyler Dralle, Shaun Beyer, Nick Duehr and a strong offensive line, but Jefferson has plenty of talent, too, with Jared Eivins, Green, Tavian Rashed and Manny Olutunde.

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It could come down to what happens in the trenches, where the Cougars appear to have the edge, but this is a rivalry again and emotion will be flowing on both sides.

Kennedy has adopted a "family" motto this season, visibly displayed when lineman/turbo fullback Dalles Jacobus carries the "family" sign when he leads the team onto the field. But Jefferson has become a tight-knit family as well, so this will be two families battling for bragging rights with much at stake for both clubs.

May the best family win.