

J-Hawks stop Lilly from netting 500

Written by Tom Fruehling

Friday, 18 December 2015 23:47 - Last Updated Friday, 18 December 2015 23:55



It wasn't a thing of beauty, but the Jefferson girls got their wish with a 38-36 win on Xavier's home floor Friday night.

"Before this week, our motto in the locker room was, 'All we want for Christmas is two big wins,'" J-Hawk point guard Avery Guy explained. "We won both games, so now we're over .500 (at 5-4) going into the break."

The Saints, on the other hand, are now 3-5 and must wait awhile longer to give veteran coach Tom Lilly his 500th career victory.

"I don't even want to talk about that," Lilly said. "What I'm interested in is what we have to do to play with the intensity we showed in the last four and a half minutes."

Up to then, it was a ragged affair as both teams had trouble holding onto the ball. Xavier had 18 turnovers for the game, Jefferson 16.

And, at times, they had trouble putting the ball in the hoop.

In a woeful third quarter, the J-Hawks outscored the Saints 3-2 and went into the final stanza ahead just 24-19.

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"It was not pretty," acknowledged Jefferson coach Jason Edwards. "But anytime you play Xavier you play at a different tempo. They're so tough defensively that it's just a matter of getting two more points.

"We answered the bell when we had to and, as a team, got some important stops."

None was more crucial, he said, than when big junior center Kennedy Dighton stole the ball after an in-bounds pass under the Saints basket with 20 seconds to go and Jefferson ahead 36-34. Dighton's two free throws gave the J-Hawks a four-point cushion.

"That was right after Kylie (Wise) was called for travelling," Edwards pointed out. "But the other girls all grouped around her and said not to worry about it, but that we'd get the next stop.

"And that's what they did. That showed some experience and being able to handle tough situations."

Guy, the savvy junior playmaker, was cool and collected all night and mostly handled the ball during crunch time at the end. She led her team with six assists.

"I think tonight we showed we could battle," she said. "When we got up on them by 11 (32-21) in the fourth quarter and they started to come back and the crowd started getting louder, we stayed calm."

It was Dighton, though, who delivered in the clutch. Held to two field goals through three periods, she scored 12 points in the fourth quarter as the Saints mounted their late comeback.

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"The way they were guarding me I had to figure out how to make adjustments to help our team," she said. "I finally decided just to take it inside."

Dighton ended up with 16 points on 6 for 9 shooting and had a team-high nine rebounds.

As a team, Jefferson shot 45 percent (14-for-31) while the Saints hit 32 percent (15-for-46). Xavier owned the boards, 34 to 22, including 13 offensive rebounds.

For his part, Lilly expressed frustration with his team's lackluster offense.

"We had open shots but, for some reason, didn't try to score," he noted. "I don't know if it was a fear of failure, or what."

"I know you can't win games when you score five points in one quarter (the first) and two points in a quarter (the third). You shouldn't win games that way."

Until his team made a rush in the last four minutes to cut the lead to two, Lilly said his club seemed to lack "a sense of urgency."

"We played scaredy-pie at times," he said. "But give them (Jefferson) credit. They hung in there and did just enough to win."

JEFFERSON (38): Kitterman 0 0-0 0, Guy 3 0-1 8, Wise 0 1-21, Dighton 6 3-5 16, Emily Oler 2 0-0 4, Donner 0 2-4 2, Melton 1 0-0 2, Kuba 10-0 3, Erica Oler 1 0-0 2.
Totals 14 6-12 38.

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XAVIER (36): Andersen 3 0-0 7, Noonan 5 2-6 13, Dickes 21-2 5, Ivester 1 0-0 2, Joens 1 0-2 2, Stanek 1 0-0 3, Helms 0 0-0 0, Brown 2 0-0 4, Steffen 0 0-0 0. Totals 15 3-936.

Halftime – Jefferson 21, Xavier 17. 3-point goals –Jefferson 4 (Guy 2, Dighton, Kuba), Xavier 3 (Andersen, Noonan, Stanek).