

Kennedy boys nip hard-luck J-Hawks

Written by Jim Ecker

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One of these days the basketball gods are going to smile on the guys from Cedar Rapids Jefferson, but it did not happen Friday night.

Again.

The Kennedy Cougars handed the J-Hawks another agonizing defeat, 54-53, in a Mississippi Valley Conference battle at the Kennedy gym.

The J-Hawks have lost their last three games by a grand total of five points with setbacks to Dubuque Senior (48-47), Cedar Falls (68-65) and now Kennedy (54-53).

"We have to have a sustained effort for all 32 minutes and cut back on the little mistakes," said Jefferson Coach Brandon Horman. "It's nice to be on the hump this year, but we've got to get over the hump."

Jefferson lost all 16 of its MVC games last season and is 0-6 in the league this year, saddling the J-Hawks with a 22-game losing streak in the conference. The skid almost ended Friday in a taut affair.

The J-Hawks carried a 49-47 lead into the final two minutes, but Michael Bisenius tied the score for Kennedy with a floater down the lane to make it 49-49 with 1:35 left.

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The Cougars got the ball again and Derek Girling found Drake Brewster in the right corner for an open 3-pointer that gave the home team a 52-49 edge with 63 seconds remaining. Brewster scored most of his game-high 17 points near the basket, but he did not hesitate from 3-point range with the game hanging in the balance.

"It was wide open and we needed a 3 to put us up," Brewster said. "I saw a great opportunity so I shot it."

Kennedy coach Jon McKowen was not looking for a 3-pointer in that situation, especially with so much time on the clock, but he was certainly happy with the results.



"The plan was to spread the floor, go for the last shot," McKowen said. "We were calling for that type of action."

"I was looking at Girling to call the play and his eyes kind of lit up. I had no idea what was going on behind me. He did a great job of finding Drake in transition. And Drake's a good 3-point shooter, so we're going to take our shot with that."

James Brown scored for Jefferson with 45 seconds left to pull the J-Hawks within 52-51. Brewster made two free throws with 23.1 seconds remaining to give Kennedy a 54-51 lead.

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Jefferson called a timeout with 17.8 seconds left, had trouble getting anything going on offense and called another timeout with 7.8 seconds left, needing a 3-pointer to tie and force overtime.

Kane Kramer, who made five 3-pointers in the contest for Jefferson, could not find an opening and flung a high shot toward the basket in the final seconds, hoping for a miracle. Dennis McKinney grabbed the errant shot for the J-Hawks and hit a layup at the buzzer to make it 54-53, but there was no time for anything else to happen.

Horman wanted somebody take charge in the final seconds and make a big play, but it did not occur.

"We're a very unselfish group, but sometimes we need somebody to step up and take control of the team," he said. "We're still looking for that guy."

Kennedy raised its records to 5-6 overall and 3-4 in the league. Jefferson fell to 3-9 overall.

"That's a good Jefferson ballclub," McKowen said. "They've been playing everybody really tight all year.

"They really got us physically underneath and that's what kept the game really tight. We couldn't rebound with them, but I thought down the stretch we did a really good job of playing situation basketball and got some stops so we could run out of here with a win tonight."

Kennedy never led by more than three points the entire game. Jefferson had a five-point lead early in the second half.

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Kramer led Jefferson with his five triples for 15 points. Adam Van Oort scored 11 points for the J-Hawks and James Brown had 10. Jefferson attempted only one free throw.

Matt Berst scored 11 points for Kennedy.

Iowa football coach Kirk Ferentz attended Friday night's game to visit with Kennedy senior Shaun Beyer, who has committed to the Hawkeyes, but Beyer did not play for the Cougars due to a sprained ankle.

JEFFERSON (53): Webb 4 0-0 8, Wiederin 1 0-0 3, Green 1 0-0 2, Kramer 5 0-0 15, Brown 4 1-1 10, McCauley 0 0-0 0, Van Oort 4 0-0 11, McKinney 2 0-0 4, Larson 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 1-2 53.

KENNEDY (54): Brewster 6 4-6 17, Gardner 0 0-2 0, Girling 2 0-0 5, Berst 4 0-0 11, Diggins 3 3-4 9, Foley 0 0-0 0, Bisenius 3 0-0 8, Wall 2 0-2 4. Totals 20 7-14 54.

Halftime - Kennedy 27, Jefferson 26. 3-point goals Jefferson 10 (Kramer 5, Van Oort 3, Wiederin 1, Brown 1), Kennedy 7 (Berst 3, Bisenius 2, Brewster 1, Girling 1).