

Wash girls press Jeff into trouble

Written by Jim Ecker

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The speedy girls from Cedar Rapids Washington love to run and press and create as much havoc as possible on a basketball court.

It worked Friday night.

The Warriors tormented the Jefferson J-Hawks with their press in the first half and raced to a 25-point lead before settling for a 76-70 victory in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Jefferson.

The Warriors made 20 steals and forced the J-Hawks into 31 turnovers, including 18 miscues in the first half.

Jefferson made a spirited rally in the second half and pulled all the way within five points in the final seconds, but it was too little and too late.

The shorter Warriors capitalized on their speed and athletic ability to beat the taller J-Hawks.

The basketball floor is 84 feet long and the Warriors used every inch of it to press the J-Hawks into submission, especially in the first half.

"It disrupts them," said 5-foot-1 senior Joniqua Clark, who leads Class 5A in steals. "It gets under your skin and makes you plan frantic."

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Washington was sitting on a routine 17-16 lead after the first quarter when the Warriors went to work with their skin-tight defensive pressure that resulted in a string of turnovers by the J-Hawks. It was a case of turnover-turnover-turnover and layup-layup-layup as Washington poured in 16 straight points for a 33-16 lead.



Jefferson scored, but then Anne Visser popped in two straight 3-pointers and Jayla Johnson scored after another Jefferson turnover to finish a 24-2 spurt that gave the Warriors a 41-18 advantage. It became a 25-point bulge a minute later.

That 24-2 run happened in a blink of an eye, taking about four minutes off the clock.

Washington pummeled Jefferson 32-14 in the second quarter and led 49-30 at intermission.

"The second quarter was a killer. A killer," Jefferson coach Jason Edwards said. "You can't spot a team like Washington a lead like that and be so loose with the ball.

"You can't spot a team like that 31 turnovers and think you're going to come out on top."

Visser led Washington (9-6, 4-4) with 18 points and six rebounds. She nailed four 3-pointers in the first half and had 16 points by intermission.

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Johnson converted a series of layups and a 3-pointer for 15 points and came away with seven steals for Washington. Clark finished with 11 points, seven assists, five steals and five rebounds. Jessi Puk contributed 10 points and four steals. Payton Bruner and Sammy Mia scored eight points apiece for the Warriors.

Johnson and Puk are Washington's tallest starters at 5-foot-9 and Visser, the designated center, is 5-foot-8. Jefferson countered with good height with Kennedy Dighton and Emily Oler, a pair of 6-foot-1 players, but speed beat size in this game.

"We're not really traditional," Washington coach Frank Howell said. "We can't be traditional. We don't have a prototypical post player.

"Some nights that poses a problem, but the flip side of it is we usually have five skilled players that can make shots and spread the floor."

Clark enjoys playing in Washington's up-tempo defensive scheme.

"I honestly love it," she said. "It's fast. We're short, so we can push the pace. We love it. All our drills are transition and running."

Despite their problems in the first half, the J-Hawks (7-8, 5-3) never quit and kept battling. Jefferson pulled within 15 points at 61-46 after three quarters and kept pecking away behind Dighton and Avery Guy.

Dighton, who finished with 27 points, pulled Jefferson within 61-54 with a three-point play with 6:53 left in the game, still plenty of time for the J-Hawks to pull off a tremendous comeback. The Warriors pulled themselves back together, however, and grabbed a 14-point advantage at 69-55 on a

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pair of baskets by Clark.

Jefferson pulled within nine points at 69-60 and 71-62, but the J-Hawks eventually ran out of time. Dighton made it a seven-point game at 72-65, but there were only 37 seconds left at that point.

Dighton canned a 3-pointer with 2.8 seconds remaining to make it 75-70. Bruner made one free throw for Washington to finish the scoring.

Guy scored 14 points for the J-Hawks and teamed with Dighton to make it interesting in the second half.

"We challenged them at halftime," Edwards said. "They're leaders on this team, they have to be aggressive."

WASHINGTON (76): Clark 4 3-4 11, Carey 0 0-0 0, Visser 6 2-2 18, V.Eniola 0 0-0 0, M.Hoeger 0 0-0 0, Bruner 2 3-6 8, Puk 3 4-5 10, Riley 2 0-0 6, Mia 4 0-0 8, Johnson 7 0-2 15. Totals 28 12-19 76.

JEFFERSON (70): Kitterman 1 1-3 3, Guy 4 5-6 14, Donner 1 0-0 2, Wise 3 0-0 8, Melton 0 0-0 0, Kuba 1 1-2 3, Erica Oler 3 1-3 7, Dighton 10 4-6 27, Emily Oler 3 0-0 6. Totals 26 12-20 70.

Halftime - Washington 49, Jefferson 30. 3-point goals - Washington 8 (Visser 4, Riley 2, Bruner 1, Johnson 1), Jefferson 6 (Dighton 3, Wise 2, Guy 1).