

Stingy Cougars sweep series from Washington

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana has persuaded his guys to play defense with passion, pride and persistence.

It's been a simple message to get across.

"If you don't play defense, you don't play," senior Jake Misener explained. "That's how he gets us to play defense."

The stingy fourth-ranked Cougars held Washington to just three points in the third quarter Friday night and spanked the Warriors, 57-50, on Hall of Fame Night at Washington.

Washington exploded for 24 points in the second quarter and led by seven at halftime, 30-23. Fontana used the intermission to stress defense and rebounding, and Kennedy (14-2, 9-2) took his words to heart in the second half.

"A lot of them were not very good defenders last year," Fontana said. "And they have decided, 'You know what? We have to play defense if we're going to get where we want to go.'"

Christian French drew the assignment of guarding Washington sharpshooter Josh Oglesby, pitting a Division I football player (French) against a Division I basketball player (Oglesby). Oglesby scored 22 points, but forced some shots, had two air-balls and was 8-for-20 from the field, including 5 for 13 on 3-pointers.

Advantage, French.

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"I feel one of my strengths is to play shutdown defense. That's what we had to do on Oglesby," said French, a 6-foot-5, 225-pound senior who will play football at Oregon.

"Of course, with a shooter like that, you can't shut him down. The only thing you can do is pretty much contain him," said French.

"So that's what we tried to do. I think I did a pretty good job at times, and at times I didn't. I'm just glad we got the win."

Jacob Manning scored 18 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for Kennedy with an efficient game. The 6-foot-5 senior shot 6-for-9 from the field and was 6-for-7 at the foul line.

Oglesby hit a 3-pointer to give Washington a 33-25 lead early in the third quarter, but it would be nearly eight minutes before the Warriors (9-6, 7-4) made another basket. By then the Cougars owned a 40-34 advantage, thanks to a 15-1 run.

"They beat us up inside," said Washington Coach Brad Metzger.

Manning and Kyle Lamaak (14 points, 6 rebounds) did most of the heavy lifting with 11 points during the 15-1 spurt. Meanwhile, the Warriors could not buy a bucket.

Oglesby had little room to breathe, thanks mostly to French. "He's just a good athlete," said Oglesby, who has signed with Iowa. "And, of course, it's going to be hard to go around him, with him being 6-5 and athletic. We just didn't get the job done."

It resembled a track meet at times, with Oglesby running all over the court and French in hot pursuit.

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"I needed a lot of breathers," said French. "You get kind of tired, but you have to fight through that."

When Kennedy needs a defensive stopper, Fontana calls on Mr. French.

"He has improved leaps and bounds defensively since last year. He really has," Fontana said.

"I'll put him on anybody, except probably a true point guard. And you know what? I might even put him on a true point guard."

Wes Washpun, a true point guard for Washington, netted 17 points but had a quiet second half with only two field goals. He continued to struggle at the foul line, hitting 3-of-7, a season-long problem that has cost Washington the chance to win more games.

Kennedy finished 17 of 22 at the foul line for 77.3 percent, compared with 4 of 11 for Washington for 36.4 percent.

The Cougars banged the ball inside and hit 20 of 40 shots for 50 percent. They attempted only three 3-pointers and missed them all, but it hardly mattered.

The Warriors, by contrast, tried to live on 3-pointers with 22 shots from beyond the arc. They made only six for 27.3 percent, with Oglesby netting five of them. Oglesby and Washpun took 66.7 percent of Washington's shots and scored 78 percent of the points.

Kennedy beat Washington in their first meeting in December by nearly an identical score, 56-51, and they could meet again in the Class 4A substate finals March 1 at the U.S. Cellular Center, depending on the substate pairings.

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"You know what? You have to beat the best to get where you want to go," said Misener.

"Obviously, we want to wait as long as possible to meet up with them again. But if that's who we have to beat to go to state, then that's who we're going to beat."

KENNEDY (57): Manning 6 6-7 18, Misener 2 0-0 4, Lamaak 5 4-6 14, Coleman 2 3-4 7, French 3 0-1 6, Fuller 1 2-2 4, Christians 0 2-2 2, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Dixon 1 0-0 2. Totals 20 17-22 57.

WASHINGTON (50): Carr 0 0-0 0, Washpun 7 3-7 17, Moa 0 0-0 0, Oglesby 8 1-2 22, Bredl 2 0-2 4, Tann 0 0-0 0, Hoekstra 1 0-0 3, Todd 2 0-0 4. Totals 20 4-11 50.

Halftime -- Washington 30, Kennedy 23. 3-points goals -- Kennedy 0-3, Washington 6 (Oglesby 5, Hoekstra 1).