

## Kennedy girls give No. 3 team a tussle

Written by Tom Fruehling

Wednesday, 09 February 2011 16:54 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 February 2011 16:58

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It was hard to tell the winning coach from the losing one in the Kennedy gym Tuesday night.

After his third-ranked Iowa City West girls eked out a hard-fought 62-53 victory, B.J. Mayer looked like he'd been through the wringer.

"Kennedy's a nice, well-coached team," said the exuberant young coach, hoarse and drained in sweat. "Their record is very deceiving."

Veteran Cougar Coach Dennis Roloff, meanwhile, was calm and collected, looking dapper in his Kennedy green coat and tie for the post-game Senior Night celebration.

"Is there," he asked rhetorically, "a better 6 and 13 team than we are? The girls just played their hearts out."

It's fair to say there were no losers in this fast-paced contest. Both teams played toe-to-toe the whole way. Were it not for a couple of short lapses, Kennedy could have pulled out the upset.

After trailing by 11 points, the Cougars took a 24-23 lead on four straight free throws by Kassi Nunnikhoven with two minutes left in the first half. A quick missed shot with a minute to go, however, let the Women of Troy come back for seven unanswered points to regain a three-point spread at halftime.

Then, two minutes into the fourth quarter, Kennedy again went ahead 50-48 on a long 3-pointer by sharpshooter Courtney Strait. But over the next three minutes, West reeled off eight more straight points, including two dagger-like treys.

Ahead 59-52, the visitors (18-1 overall, 14-1 MVC) played slowdown the rest of the way to preserve what up to then was a nail-biting skirmish. Still, the Kennedy girls (6-13 overall, 5-10

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MVC) were upbeat even in defeat.

"It's by far the best game we've played as a team all year," said Strait, who managed 13 points with three 3-pointers despite being dogged by West defenders all night. "We really put it all together and proved to ourselves we can play with anybody. We gave it our all the whole way and never quit."

Teammate Olivia Meier, a whirling dervish who totaled 14 points, said letting the other team make runs has been a problem for the often snake-bit Cougars all year. "But we came back and stuck with them. We didn't pull this one out, but the mood in the locker room was definitely positive."

Mayer was well aware his heavily-favored squad dodged a bullet.

"We challenged the kids at the start of the fourth quarter," he said afterward. "We said now's the time to step up on defense and put some stops on them. We made some threes, got a lot of loose balls and were able to hang on."

It was, though, a fight to the finish.

Ally Disterhoft led Iowa City West with 20 points and Mckenzie Piper scored 19.

IOWA CITY WEST (62): Ally Disterhoft 7 3-5 20, Shelly Stumpff 1 0-0 2, Jessica Shull 1 0-2 3, Brianna Sturtz 2 0-2 4, Mckenzie Piper 7 4-6 19, Shahana Williams 1 0-1 2, Paige Yoder 2 0-0 5, Kelley Fliehler 0 0-0 0, Tatum Klein 2 2-3 7. Totals 23 9-19 62.

KENNEDY (53): Olivia Meier 6 1-2 14, Courtney Strait 4 2-2 13, Kassi Nunnikhoven 1 4-4 6, Shauna Happel 3 0-1 7, Kali Hildebrand 1 0-0 2, Kaylese Johnson 2 1-2 5, Mariah Simmons 2 0-0 4, Val Ross 1 0-0 2, Kristen Huebsch 0 0-0 0, Kim Muench 0 0-0 0, Ashley Schlueter 0 0-0 0, Katherine Schulz 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 8-11 53.

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Halftime -- Iowa City West 31, Kennedy 28. 3-point goals -- Iowa City West 7 (Disterhoft 3, Shull, Klein, Piper, Yoder), Kennedy 5 (Strait 3, Meier, Happel). Fouled out -- Nunnikhoven.