

Balanced Cougars knock off Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Two boys basketball teams in desperate search of a victory clashed Tuesday night at Cedar Rapids Prairie.

The Kennedy Cougars found what they were looking for, but the Prairie Hawks are still searching.

Drake Brewster led a balanced attack with 18 points as the Cougars bounced the Hawks, 69-51, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game.

Kennedy entered the game with five losses in its last six games, while Prairie arrived for tipoff with a four-game losing streak and a bunch of lopsided defeats by 37, 24, 19 and 33 points.

The night ended with both clubs sitting at 4-6 overall and 2-4 in the conference, but the Cougars felt pretty good about themselves and the Hawks went back to the drawing board.

"I think we played a lot better than we have in recent games," said Brewster, a versatile 6-foot-5 junior. "One of our main goals with the struggles we've had was to have some fun."

"We started having some fun and started smiling a little bit and got more confidence about ourselves."

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Derrick Diggins scored 13 points off the bench for Kennedy, Michael Bisenius popped in three 3-pointers and contributed 11 points, and Matt Berst scored 10 points despite playing with an injured left hand and two fingers taped together.

Kennedy coach Jon McKowen liked the way his club played for the most part, citing better shot selection, second-chance points, hustle points, an aggressive style and solid basketball plays.

"We've been making a lot of progress each week and that's really all you can ask," McKowen said. "We try not to get too frustrated in the results."



"There were times tonight where we looked like a really good basketball team, and then there were times we reverted a little bit. But that's OK, because we have a month-and-a-half left."

"It shows the character of a team when you go through a three-game losing streak, and we've done that twice this year. It's not easy," McKowen said. "It's not easy on coaches, it's not easy on players."

"If their eyes start wandering, you're in a lot of trouble, but our guys' eyes haven't started to

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wander. They've really stayed focused and engaged in every practice."

The Prairie Hawks played well in spurts, but they did not show enough depth in the scoring column to stay with Kennedy for 32 minutes. Max Smith-Drahos scored 18 points, Jalen Rima netted 13 points and Cal Clark had eight, but the rest of the club combined for 12 points.

Rima fouled out with 2:24 left in the game and the Hawks trailing by 11 points. Smith-Drahos picked up his fifth foul just eight seconds later with the Hawks down by 12 and that spelled the final death knell.

The Cougars have reached the state tournament each of the last two seasons under McKowen and think they can make another run to Des Moines this season despite their 4-6 record at the midway point of the campaign.

"We can make a big run to go to state," Brewster said. "That's our main goal, to make it to state and make it past that first round."

Kennedy senior Shaun Beyer sprained his left ankle with 2:31 left in the first half and did not return to action. He was limping when he left Prairie High School after the contest, but said he thinks he'll be all right.

KENNEDY (69): Brewster 5 7-8 18, Gardner 2 2-2 6, Girling 0 4-4 4, Berst 4 0-0 10, Duehr 0 0-0 0, Olejniczak 0 0-0 0, Krall 0 0-0 0, Diggins 2 9-12 13, Foley 0 1-2 1, Bisenius 4 0-2 11, Beyer 0 0-0 0, Wiebel 0 0-0 0, King 0 0-0 0, Wall 3 0-1 6. Totals 20 23-31 69.

PRAIRIE (51): Copeland 1 0-0 3, Clark 3 0-2 8, Smith-Drahos 7 4-4 18, Eilers 2 1-4 5, Rima 3 7-8 13, Hook 1 0-0 2, Kilpatrick 0 0-0 0, Serbousek 1 0-0 2, Oxley 0 0-0 0, Johnson 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 12-18 51.

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Halftime - Kennedy 33, Prairie 26. 3-point goals - Kennedy 6 (Bisenius 3, Berst 2, Brewster 1), Prairie 3 (Clark 2, Copeland 1).