

Prairie girls knock off No. 9 Kennedy

Written by Tom Fruehling
Wednesday, 12 December 2012 00:44 -

After his undefeated girls were upended 51-44 at Prairie Tuesday night, Kennedy Coach Tony Vis summed it up best.

“It’s not always the size of the dog in the fight,” he said. “Sometimes it’s the size of the fight in the dog.”

His Cougars came into the dogfight at 5-0 and ranked ninth in last week’s Class 5A poll.

Although playing again without injured center Morgan Martin, they still had more veterans and more height in the lineup than the short-handed Hawks.

Not only is projected Prairie starter Emilie Rotter feared lost for the season, but playmaker Madison Dellamuth missed the game with a banged-up knee. And Courteney McCrary, one of two seniors on the roster, was on the bench much of the time with foul trouble.

For a good part of the game, Prairie had four freshmen on the floor with unflappable senior leader Alisa Weiland.

Yet the scrappy underdogs pounced out to a 19-point lead in the second quarter and hung on by the skin of their teeth as Kennedy mounted a ferocious fourth-quarter rally.

“I was proud of the way we chipped the lead down to five toward the end,” Vis said. “But we dug ourselves too big a hole to climb out of.”

The Cougars played horribly in the first quarter, throwing the ball away eight times and scoring only three points on free throws.

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"We didn't come out ready to play," the first-year Kennedy coach said. "But give Prairie a lot of credit. They were very motivated and much more aggressive."

Forcing turnovers the first three times the Cougars came downcourt, the Hawks jumped off to a quick 10-3 lead. Putting together an 11-1 run over four minutes, they stretched their lead to 26-7 with two minutes left in the half.

Kennedy didn't score its first field goal until the 4:30 mark in the second quarter, and by that time the Cougars were behind by 15.

"That was as good a half defensively as I've seen in a long, long time," said Prairie Coach Steve Doser. "We were aggressive, got our hands on the ball in the passing lanes and pressured the shooters."

"We tell the girls that good defense creates good offense. And we came out of the gate focused and ready to go after 'em."

With point guard Dellamuth nursing a sore knee that will likely keep her out of Friday's game as well, it was left to the steady and wily Weiland to run the show. And she did it wonderfully.

She was a whirling dervish on defense, hit two 3-pointers during the first half, dished out assists to the underclassmen and kept her young team poised.

"Alisa always plays hard, and she always plays heady," Doser said.

For her part, Weiland said she was just doing her part.

"When we have a player down like we did tonight, someone has to pick it up and fill the spot,"

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she said. "And I thought our freshmen did a great job. They played like seniors tonight."

Playing all 32 minutes, cool-as-a-cucumber ninth grader Olivia Usher crashed the boards, contributed nine points and was a pest on defense.

"The coaches have preached all year about rebounding," Usher said. "We've practiced it, and tonight the hard work paid off."

Still, the Hawks almost squandered their big lead.

Playing with much more passion in the second half, Kennedy went on an 8-0 run. McCrary, who didn't play at all in the second quarter after getting two fouls, picked up her fourth with six minutes left but stayed in the game. Good thing, too.

Kennedy cut the lead to seven on a 3-pointer by Jordan Holmes with 1:20 left, followed by a tip-in from Stephanie Botkin. But McCrary, who scored 15 points in limited action, knocked down two clutch free throws.

After another 3-pointer by Kennedy's Madison Meier cut the margin to four, McCrary made one of two from the foul line to ice the game with 30 seconds left.

"We played way too passive down the stretch," Doser said. "We'll have to learn from that. We were just very fortunate to hang on at the end."

KENNEDY (44): Madison Meier 2 3-4 8, Brianna Vis 0 0-0 0, Taylor Wagner 2 2-2 6, Paige Hendrickson 3 2-2 8, Stephanie Botkin 4 1-4 9, Jordan Holmes 1 1-2 4, Mariah Vis 2 0-0 4, Madison DeLong 2 1-2 5. Totals 16 10-16 44.

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PRAIRIE (51): Cyerra Hutchins 2 2-4 6, Alisa Weiland 4 0-2 10, Courteney McCrary 5 4-5 15, Olivia Usher 2 4-4 9, Taylor Moenk 2 0-0 4, Rachel Shelangoski 1 0-0 2, Makenzie Stoffer 1 0-0 2, Haley Street 0 0-0 0, Linsey Altenhofen 0 0-0 0, Grace Gudenkauf 1 0-0 3. Totals 18 10-15 51.

Halftime – Prairie 28, Kennedy 11. 3-point goals – Kennedy 2 (Meier 1, Holmes 1), Prairie 5 (Weiland 2, McCrary 1, Usher 1, Gudenkauf 1).