

Prairie braces for Kennedy's power attack

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 28 October 2013 22:15 -

Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey knows what the Kennedy Cougars will try to do against his team Wednesday night in the Class 4A playoffs.

"It's not a surprise," he said Monday. "The problem is, it's very difficult to stop."

The Cougars play power football, plain and simple. "Pound and ground," they call it, with two tight ends at times, their patented Stack-I formation in the backfield and plenty of beef up front.

Kennedy (6-3) and Prairie (5-4) will play the second game of a playoff doubleheader Wednesday at Kingston Stadium in southwest Cedar Rapids, with kickoff scheduled for approximately 8 p.m. Washington (6-3) meets Cedar Falls (6-3) in the first game at 5:30 p.m.

Kennedy did not complete a single pass when it upset Iowa City High, 35-14, last Friday night with power football on offense AND defense. "That speaks volumes of what they can do," said Morrissey.

Kennedy has run the ball 78 percent of the time this season and has gained 80 percent of its yards on running plays. Tailback Miles Moa galloped for 300 yards against Iowa City High and has 1,125 yards for the season.

It's not one-sided, however, in favor of Kennedy. Not by any means.

Like the Cougars, the Prairie Hawks have some big, strong people on the offensive line. And like the Cougars, the Hawks have a prolific tailback with Mitch Christensen and his 1,111 yards.

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It's power versus power.

"I think big-time," said Morrissey.

Kennedy has relied on its running game for a number of years, but this is something new for Prairie under Morrissey. The Hawks passed for 2,867 yards and ran for 1,494 last year with Jace Hanna at quarterback, but the 2-to-1 ratio has been reversed this season.

Prairie has rushed for 2,044 yards and passed for 979 this season. "Our identity has sort of shifted toward the run game as the season's progressed," said Morrissey.

And just like Kennedy, the Hawks are known for their hard-nosed defense.

Kennedy rallied from a 10-point deficit and clipped the Hawks, 28-24, during the second week of the regular season at Prairie. "We just got pushed around, especially the second half," said Morrissey.

Both quarterbacks - Trey Beckman for Prairie and Derek Jacobus for Kennedy - are capable passers, so neither team can afford to simply crowd the line of scrimmage and ignore the wide receivers.

The Cougars threw the ball only three times against Iowa City High, with no connections.

"We've got to be able to throw the ball a little bit, I think, against Prairie," Kennedy Coach Tim Lewis said Sunday, "but I probably would have said that before the City High game, too."

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Mitch Dellamuth, one of Prairie's top receivers and defensive backs, is back at full strength after playing much of the season with extra padding on a broken hand, giving Beckman an important target for the playoffs.

Kennedy knows it can beat Prairie, because they did it once before this season. And Prairie knows it can beat Kennedy, because they had a 10-point lead in the second half before it slipped away.

"It's hard to beat a good team two times in a year, and we all know that," said Lewis. "Our kids realize that was not an easy win."

Kennedy is the No.7 seed and Prairie is the No.10 in the Eastern half of the Class 4A playoffs. The winner will face No.2 seed Davenport Assumption (8-1) or No.15 seed Davenport Central (4-5) in the second round on Monday.