

J-Hawks clipped by Cedar Falls in key MVC tilt

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Falls Tigers took a big step toward winning a division basketball title Monday night by beating Jefferson in an important game at Jefferson.

If these two teams meet again, a trip to the state tournament would be the grand prize.

James Harrington poured in 24 points as the seventh-ranked Tigers tripped the ninth-ranked J-Hawks, 60-54, to grab control of the Valley Division race in the Mississippi Valley Conference.

Cedar Falls (10-2) has a two-game lead over Jefferson (8-4) in the Valley Division with four MVC games left in the regular season, so the Tigers are in command.

Winning a division title is nice, but making the state tournament in Des Moines is twice as nice. The Tigers and J-Hawks could meet in the Class 4A substate finals at the McLeod Center in Cedar Falls on March 1 in a rematch.

"It would be a tough game," said Jarrod Uthoff, who had a difficult time Monday night. "If we both end up there, it will be a tough matchup like this one."

Uthoff, who leads the state in scoring at 25.9 points, netted 20 points but made only one field goal in the second half. It came with 23 seconds left in the game and the J-Hawks trailing by nine points.

"I was proud of our effort," said Cedar Falls Coach Tom Bardal, who used a box-and-one against Uthoff. "It was the defensive effort from Bobby Brummel and Matt Allender switching off on him. I thought those two kids did a real nice job."

Jefferson lost its second straight game without injured point guard Taylor Olson, who is nursing a back problem. The J-Hawks suffered at both ends of the floor without him. They missed their

floor general, and they missed his defensive prowess against Harrington.

"Taylor adds a lot to our team," said Uthoff. "He's amazing with the ball and he knows what to do with it, he penetrates very well, he's a great passer. He's very valuable to our team."

Harrington, a 6-foot-1 junior, is one of the top athletes in the state. He won the 200-meter dash at the 2010 state track meet, he's a talented receiver for the football team and he's a 21-point scorer for the basketball squad.

"He's very, very quick and can elevate," said Jefferson Coach Stu Ordman. "So that's a tough matchup."

Harrington scored his points in spurts, usually when the Tigers needed them most. He collected 10 points in the fourth quarter and hit four straight free throws in the final 45 seconds.

"Toward the end of the game, when it's close and we're up, I just want to run down the clock," he said. "I like having the ball in my hands and I like shooting free throws at the end."

Jefferson hopes to have Olson back for the end of the season and the 4A playoffs, which begin in two weeks. The substate pairings, seedings and sites will be announced Tuesday and there's a good chance Cedar Falls and Jefferson will be seeded 1-2, which means they'd be favored to meet in the substate finals.

"Hopefully we'll play well enough to get to the substate finals," said Ordman, whose team fell to 12-4 overall. "It will be interesting to see how much we can improve from this game until then."

Cedar Falls owns bragging rights for now.

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"We let them know that we're good and that we can beat them," said Harrington. "It was a good matchup, and it's going to be a great matchup in substate. So I'm looking forward to it."

Jefferson led midway through the third period, 35-33, but a 3-pointer by Tony Johnson gave Cedar Falls the lead for good at 36-35. The Tigers led 41-38 early in the fourth quarter when Harrington scored three straight buckets to make it 47-40 with four minutes left. Jefferson never got closer than five points again.

Tyler Hemphill, who had scored 13 points all season for the J-Hawks, made his first start and scored 12 points. Tyler Meiborg and Alec Saunders netted 10 apiece for Jefferson.

Caleb Konieczny scored 13 points for Cedar Falls (12-3 overall). Johnson gave the Tigers a big lift off the bench with 11 points.

Jefferson and Cedar Falls were supposed to have played last Tuesday, but that game got snowed out and rescheduled for Monday. The Tigers returned home after Monday's game, but will return to Cedar Rapids Tuesday night for a game at Washington.

CEDAR FALLS (60): James Harrington 10 4-4 24, Caleb Konieczny 4 2-2 13, Matthew Klinehart 1 0-0 2, Isaac Boettger 1 0-0 2, Matthew Allender 1 1-2 3, Kalund Brown 0 0-2 0, Kalehl Brown 1 0-0 2, Robert Brummel 1 1-1 3, Tony Johnson 4 2-4 11, Nicholas Clark 0 0-0 0. Totals 23 10-15 60.

JEFFERSON (54): Tyler Meiborg 4 1-2 10, Tyler Hemphill 4 2-2 12, Ky Kramer 1 0-0 2, Alec Saunders 4 0-0 10, Jarrod Uthoff 5 10-13 20, Alex Denny 0 0-2 0, Michael Rooney 0 0-0 0, Alec Brown 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 13-17 54.

Halftime -- Cedar Falls 25, Jefferson 25. 3-point goals -- Cedar Falls 4 (Konieczny 3, Johnson), Jefferson 5 (Hemphill 2, Saunders 2, Meiborg).