

Uthoff shines as J-Hawks upend Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jarrold Uthoff bought a ticket and watched his future teammates at the University of Wisconsin defeat Iowa in a physical game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Wednesday night.

It inspired him Friday night against Kennedy.

Uthoff scored 26 points, snared a career-high 19 rebounds and blocked five shots as No. 9 Jefferson upended the third-ranked Cougars, 53-44, at Jefferson.

The 26 points were typical (he leads the state at 26.2 per game), but the 19 rebounds and five blocks were nearly twice his norm. He played a fierce, inspired game at both ends of the court, 48 hours after watching that physical game in Iowa City.

"I realized I need to get a lot stronger and be more physical to play in the Big Ten," he said. "And I figured I should start playing like it right now."

Uthoff is 6-foot-8 and 190 pounds, but he's gained 10 pounds of muscle since last season and does a better job of catching the ball in traffic. He's also a stronger defender and held Kennedy's Jake Manning to six points, about half his average.

Kennedy Coach Bob Fontana thought Uthoff played great.

"He wanted it," said Fontana. "It was important to him. He stepped up. And that's why he's the player he is."

Asked if Uthoff should be Mr. Basketball in Iowa this year, Fontana thought for a minute, mulled other possible candidates and responded, "Yeah. I think he is."

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The J-Hawks avenged a 44-37 loss at Kennedy last month when the Cougars controlled Uthoff, but he scored Jefferson's first eight points Friday and excelled in all facets of the game. He nailed a pair of 3-pointers and went 12-for-12 at the foul line, in addition to his defense and rebounding.

"Oh, there's always room for improvement," said Jefferson Coach Stu Ordman, who knows Uthoff is special but won't let him settle for second-best in anything.

The J-Hawks appeared determined from the start.

"We had a lot to play for," said Uthoff. "Kennedy is a great team. We knew we had to fight, because Kennedy is so big and physical and really good.

"We were the underdog," he said. "We really had nothing to lose. We came out playing like it."

Fontana was not happy with his team's performance. According to Kennedy's chart, Jefferson won the rebound battle 34-25.

"That was very disappointing to get beat that bad on the boards," he said. "We didn't make free throws and we got out-rebounded. That's a telling story right there."

Jefferson shot 15-for-15 at the foul line, with Uthoff 12-for-12 and Tyler Meiborg 3-for-3. Kennedy was 6-for-13 on free throws.

Ordman thought the refs could have (and maybe should have) called more fouls.

"A real physical game," he said. "Kennedy is big and strong and physical and (likes) pushing us around and hand-checking. You know, just doing and seeing what they can get away with. I

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thought some of our guys were pretty shifty in drawing fouls."

Christian French tied the game for Kennedy, 26-26, with the first basket of the second half, but Alec Saunders and Ky Kramer hit consecutive 3-pointers to give Jefferson a 32-26 advantage.

Uthoff hit two free throws and nailed a 3-pointer from the corner, then Meiborg scored to finish a 7-0 spurt and give the J-Hawks a 10-point bulge at 41-31 with about six minutes left to play. Kennedy never got closer than five points again.

Uthoff hit six straight free throws in the final 56 seconds and Meiborg added a pair with 14 seconds left.

Jefferson (14-4, 10-4) won the game without injured point guard Taylor Olson, who wanted to play but could not with an injured ligament in his back. Meiborg scored 10 points and Kramer finished with eight.

Kyle Lamaak led Kennedy (14-4, 9-4) with 13 points. Jake Misener scored nine points and Josiah Coleman tallied eight.

The Cougars, ranked No. 3 in the AP poll on Monday, lost a pair of Mississippi Valley Conference road games this week to Iowa City West and Jefferson, which share the No. 9 spot in the rankings.

KENNEDY (44): Misener 4 0-1 9, Coleman 4 0-0 8, Manning 2 2-3 6, Lamaak 5 2-5 13, French 3 0-2 6, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Dixon 0 0-0 0, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Christians 0 2-2 2. Totals 18 6-13 44.

JEFFERSON (53): Hemphill 1 0-0 2, Kramer 3 0-0 8, Saunders 2 0-0 5, Denny 0 0-0 0, Uthoff 6 12-12 26, Meiborg 3 3-3 10, Rooney 0 0-0 0, Larsen 1 0-0 2. Totals 16 15-15 53.

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Halftime -- Jefferson 26, Kennedy 24. 3-point goals -- Kennedy 2 (Misener 1, Lamaak 1), Jefferson 6 (Uthoff 2, Kramer 2, Saunders 1, Meiborg 1).