

## Cougars deserve cheers, not jeers

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 26 October 2014 20:11 -

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It would be easy to make fun of the Kennedy Cougars for making the Class 4A football playoffs with a 2-7 record, but that would be a big mistake.

First of all, the Kennedy players are not responsible for the new district format this year that made it possible for 2-7 clubs to advance. Administrators did that, not the athletes.

Secondly, the Cougars should be applauded for sticking with it and playing hard after a rough 0-6 start. They had to adjust to a new head coach and new offensive scheme, and they lost a couple of games they could have - maybe should have - won.

Kennedy began the season with a 12-9 setback at Iowa City City when the Trojans threw a 33-yard touchdown pass on 4th-and-15 with 1:59 left in the game. Four weeks later, the Cougars missed a 33-yard field on the final play of the fourth quarter and fell to Jefferson, 27-24, in overtime

Two weeks ago, the Cougars scored a touchdown with 71 seconds left against Cedar Falls to pull within 21-20, but they unable to convert a two-point conversion and lost by a single point.

Kennedy might be the best 2-and-7 team in the state. The Cougars face Muscatine on the road Wednesday night in the opening round of the playoffs, and you can bet the Muskies are taking it seriously despite their own 7-2 record.

Don't be surprised if Kennedy gives Muscatine a good game. And don't be shocked if Kennedy comes home with a victory.

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Metro teams have compiled a 9-3 record against Mississippi Athletic Conference teams this season and this is another of those Metro-MAC contests. Kennedy has an 0-2 record against MAC schools this season with losses to North Scott and Pleasant Valley, but those games were played during the first month of the season and much has changed.

The Cougars looked good in their 48-28 victory over Waterloo West Friday night when they clinched a No. 3 seed for the playoffs. They have been outscored only slightly this year, 231-202, which are not typical numbers for a 2-7 club.

Kennedy quarterback Sammy Lizarraga has passed for 1,147 yards and 15 touchdowns this season after a slow start. He has completed 50.5 percent of his throws and likes to find Shaun Beyer (27 catches for 386 yards and seven TDs).

Running backs Tyler Dralle, Logan Wedo and Jay Blank have combined for 1,426 yards on the ground in nine games, giving the Cougars a fairly balanced attack.

Six Metro teams made the playoffs this year. The top-ranked Washington Warriors (9-0) are heavily favored to handle Clinton (2-7) in the first round and Linn-Mar (8-1) is a solid pick over Davenport Central (4-5).

Prairie (4-5) will be the underdog at Pleasant Valley (6-3), but the Hawks unveiled a new power running attack against Ottumwa Friday night and looked like a different club. Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey played quarterback at Pleasant Valley and is hoping to upset his alma mater in the opening round.

The Jefferson J-Hawks (4-5) have a tough chore at second-ranked Bettendorf (9-0). The J-Hawks have made the playoffs for the first time since 2006 and are vastly improved this year, but their four victories came against teams with a combined record of 3-33.

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The Xavier Saints (6-3) host Charles City (5-4) in a Class 3A opener. Xavier reached the championship game in Class 4A in 2012 and 2013 and is hoping for a long run again this year in the 3A field.

The IHSAA will announce second-round pairings once all the first-round games are finished Wednesday night. The second round will be held on Monday, Nov. 3.