

No. 5 Cougars spike No. 3 Lions

Written by Jim Ecker

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For awhile Tuesday night, it looked like big Amanda Ollinger was going to personally wreck the Kennedy Cougars in their volleyball showdown with Linn-Mar at the Kennedy gym.

The Cougars kept their cool and battled back for a 17-25, 25-22, 25-17, 25-15 victory over the Lions in a battle between two of the top Class 5A volleyball teams in the state.

Linn-Mar is ranked No. 3 and Kennedy is ranked No. 5, but the experienced Cougars were the better club this time.

Ollinger, a 6-foot-1 senior who will play basketball for the Iowa Hawkeyes, collected eight kills in the first set as the Lions got off to a fast start, but she had only 10 more kills the rest of the night.

"We started off a little shaky," Kennedy senior Tianna Drahn acknowledged.

Once the Cougars settled down, they made it harder for Ollinger to get the ball in her favorite spots and Kennedy took over. It began with a tight 25-22 victory in Game 2 and snowballed from there.

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"It was momentum," said Drahn. "We had a lot of momentum going into those last two games. Once you get going, you don't stop."

Ollinger is one of the top volleyball and basketball players in the state, but Kennedy has a talented team with four seniors who will play sports in college next year. Brinley Milbrath (Northern Illinois), Anna Fluent (Loyola) and Macy Anderson (Nebraska-Omaha) will play volleyball in college and Drahn is headed to the University of Northern Iowa for softball.

The Cougars have more veterans than the Lions and it showed as the match wore on.

"Experience pays off in key situations," Linn-Mar coach Teresa Kehe said. "You need to experience these situations to allow yourself to learn. The more you're in those situations, hopefully the better you handle them."



"We have a journey ahead of us," she said. "Hopefully we'll get better."

Milbrath and Paige Franck led the balanced Cougars with 13 kills apiece and Anderson had 11. Kennedy struggled in the first set, then got contributions from just about everybody who stepped on the court.

"We got stronger as the match went on," said Kennedy Coach Michelle Goodall. "One thing I'm most proud of is their mental capacity to stay even."

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Kennedy looked out of sync at the start.

"We were really tense," said Milbrath. "We just weren't prepared at the beginning. We didn't have that drive and energy level."

The key to the turnaround was keeping Ollinger under wraps.

"She's amazing," said Milbrath. "She has great 'ups'. I'm half-an-inch taller than her -- I like to pride myself on that -- but her arm reach is so much higher than mine. It's like half-a-foot longer.

"She really gets on top of the ball. Give her props for that."

Goodall said the Cougars did a better job of placing their shots to make it harder for the Lions to feed Ollinger in scoring position. They also did a better job of getting their taller players like Milbrath in Ollinger's face.

"Our kids, kudos to them," said Goodall. "We were smart to take her a little bit out of it as the match went on. I think we did a good job. If they're in system, she's going to terminate."