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SPOTLIGHT

Koster leads Kearney Cats to championship in his father's tournament

By GRANT BOSIACKI
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Kearney Cats' Kanon Koster goes up for a layup against the MO Mavericks in the Mr. Basketball championship game.

Eldon Holmes K

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KEARNEY — Kearney Cats forward Kanon Koster put on quite the show for hometown fans to see over the weekend in the 25th annual Mr. Basketball Tournament.

After winning their first four games on Thursday and Friday, the Cats won all three games Saturday to win the tournament. The dash through the tournament culminated in Koster's 40-point performance in the championship game.

Koster raised plenty of eyebrows to start the day on Saturday when he scored 38 points to help Kearney squeak by the Oklahoma Servants 71-69.

The 38 points was the most points Koster said he'd ever scored in a game. The personal record only stood two games.

Koster then helped Kearney advance to the championship with a team-high 23 points in a 53-47 win NdaGym of Missouri.

He saved his best for last, with a memorable 40-point performance in the Cats 72-65 win over MO Maverick 17 Black.

"It was pretty special. I've never scored 40, so it was kind of cool. The number 40 is a cool number," Koster said.

It was the first time Kearney has advanced to the championship in the tournament's history.

"It's awesome just because of all the hard work we've put in," Koster said. "This is our tournament because it's in Kearney and all of us have been around it for plenty of years."

Gallery: 7-9-16 Mr. Basketball Championship by Eldon Holmes

Koster leads Kearney Cats to championship in his father's



Especially Koster, whose father, Doug, is the founder and director of the tournament, one of the premier summer basketball events in Nebraska.

Kearney Cats coach Drake Beranek said winning Mr. Basketball was a great send-off to end summer play. Winning all seven games in the tournament was “a huge accomplishment” for the program and Beranek said it even surprised him to see how well his team played.

“This was a pretty quality tournament and there were some good teams,” he said. “I definitely wasn’t expecting to win. I was expecting to be competitive, but my expectation probably wasn’t necessarily winning. These guys stepped up and exceeded our expectations.”

But, to the agreement of his coach, the story of the weekend starts and ends with Koster. Starting center Shiloh Robinson pitched in with 11 points in the championship

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went



through Koster the entire second half.

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“I love it. It makes a bad coach look pretty decent at times,” Beranek said of having the luxury of giving Koster the ball and letting him do the rest down the stretch.

As a sophomore last season, it was visible each week seeing his confidence grow. That confidence reached new heights. The 6-foot-3 forward was attacking the rim off the dribble courageously all game long in the championship, getting 18 of his 40 points at the free throw line.

It appears he’s now starting to realize just how good he can be.

“Kanon is a phenomenal talent and he’s starting to figure out how to get that next-type of mentality... That go-getter, give me the basketball and get out of my way type of thing,” Beranek said. “I’m definitely happy he’s on our team.”

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