

Linn-Mar boys too strong for Saints

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Linn-Mar Lions had a few things to prove when the basketball season began in November.

Matt Lassen had to prove he was fully recovered from a serious head injury and not afraid of contact around the basket.

Jimmy Roth had to prove he could fit seamlessly onto the team and be a leader after being suspended for the first four games of the season.

Jordan Bohannon had to prove he deserved to play on the varsity as a freshman, whether his name was Bohannon or not.

The answers appear to be yes, yes and yes.

Lassen, Roth and Bohannon played pivotal roles Friday night as Linn-Mar topped Xavier, 56-44, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at the Linn-Mar gym.

The victory gave the Lions a 26-1 record against the Saints since the series began 15 years ago.

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"We've got a little momentum going right now," Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson said after the Lions (5-6, 4-4) won their third straight game. "The guys are playing with a little more confidence. I think that's been the key."

Linn-Mar, a basketball giant the past 10 years with three state titles, began the season with a 2-6 record as the Lions adjusted to life after Marcus Paige. Four of those losses were by 3, 2, 2 and 2 points.

"We're not that far away," said Robertson. "You turn those four games around and we're 9-and-2 and the outlook is a whole lot different."



Lassen missed most of the 2011-12 campaign with a severe concussion, but he looked good against Xavier with 16 points. He drove hard to the basket, battled for rebounds and showed he's not afraid to bump and grind.

"I did get hurt and it was a little bit scary," said Lassen. "My whole life, I've never been afraid of contact."

"I'm not afraid to go to the rim, I'm not going to back down from anybody. Just because I got hurt, I wasn't going to change that. You're not going to see me shy away from contact or be soft or anything like that."

Roth missed the first four games due to a violation of school rules, but he's back in the lineup

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and playing well again. The Upper Iowa signee contributed 11 points Friday.

"It was hard," Roth said about the suspension. "I messed up and made a mistake. I hope my teammates learn to forgive me. As of right now we're over it."

Bohannon comes from one of the top basketball families in state history. His older brothers Jason, Zach and Matt all starred for the Lions and helped them win state titles, and now the youngest brother is getting to play as a ninth grader.

Jason Bohannon scored 1,679 points for Linn-Mar and enjoyed a solid collegiate career at Wisconsin. Matt Bohannon scored 1,065 points at Linn-Mar and is playing for the University of Northern Iowa, and Zach Bohannon collected 1,033 points as a Lion and is playing at Wisconsin.

"It's a big role to follow after everything they've done," Jordan Bohannon said. "I've been trying not to pay too much attention to it, but then again remember where I came from and everything they taught me."

Bohannon matched his season-high with 13 points Friday and hit six straight free throws in the final two minutes.

Jason Bohannon was known as J-Bo during his high school and college days. Jordan Bohannon, a smaller version of his brothers, has been dubbed J-Bo 2.

Xavier students tried to distract Bohannon with chants of "Ja-son's bet-ter, Ja-son's bet-ter" while he was taking free throws Friday, but he calmly swished them all. Linn-Mar students responded proudly with "He's our fresh-man, he's our fresh-man."

"I've gotten that a couple of times," Bohannon said about being taunted. "I just try to block it out."

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Robertson has given Bohannon the ball and told him to run the club as a rookie point guard in a tough league. The coach originally thought he'd put Bohannon on the sophomore team, then changed his mind.

"I thought, 'Let's give him a chance,'" Robertson said. "We'll put him out there, and if he can't do it we can put him at the sophomore level.

"He's smart, he's very competitive. He's going to be so much better next week and the next week. I'm really happy with him. I think his progress is good. He's going to be a good one."

Bohannon said he worked hard over the summer, hoping he'd get a chance this season.

"I wanted my shot to play as a freshman and he gave it to me," said Bohannon. "He called me into his office and told me he's going to give me a shot to play varsity from Day 1, so I just took the opportunity and I made the most of it."

Bohannon has scored 79 points in 11 games for a 7.2 average. As of now, the four Bohannon boys have produced 3,856 points for Linn-Mar basketball and the number is rising.

"When I heard he was going to be moved up to the varsity I said, 'He must be good, but he's small,'" Lassen remarked. "I've been really, really impressed with Jordan.

"He's a good leader, just like all of his brothers in the past. He's going to keep getting better every game and by the end he's going to be right there with the top point guards in the league."

Linn-Mar opened a 44-29 lead with 5:55 remaining on two free throws by Roth, but the Saints went on a 12-2 spurt and pulled within 46-41 on a 3-pointer by Corbin Woods. Bohannon then made four straight free throws to get the Lions out of danger.

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Matt Nelson led the Saints (7-5, 3-4) with 15 points. Trey Sampson scored 11 points, but scored only one point in the second half.

Linn-Mar will try to reach the .500 mark Saturday afternoon when it plays La Crosse (Wis.) Aquinas at the La Crosse Civic Center at 4 p.m.

"If we keep getting better like this, the ceiling is very, very high for us," said Lassen. "I think we'll be right there at the end."

Lassen plans to sign an NCAA Division I scholarship with Albany (N.Y.) this spring.

Linn-Mar made 21 of 24 free throws.

XAVIER (44): Winker 0 2-2 2, Sampson 4 1-3 11, McDermott 1 0-0 2, Bisenius 3 0-0 8, Nelson 6 3-4 15, Woods 1 3-4 6, Schulte 0 0-0 0, Scholer 0 0-0 0. Totals 15 9-13 44.

LINN-MAR (56): Martins 2 0-0 5, Lassen 4 7-8 16, Bohannon 3 6-6 13, Schlotterback 3 0-0 6, Roth 3 5-6 11, Halupnik, 0 0-0 0, Meier 0 0-0 0, Gogg 1 3-4 5, Schmidt 0 0-0 0, Uhlir 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 21-24 56.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 30, Xavier 24. 3-point goals - Xavier 5 (Sampson 2, Bisenius 2, Woods 1), Linn-Mar 3 (Martins 1, Lassen 1, Bohannon 1).