

Lions belt Hempstead in substate opener

Written by Tom Fruehling
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No strangers to the state tournament, the Linn-Mar boys suddenly look like they might be contenders again.

They've been to Des Moines a record nine straight times (and grabbed three titles during that span). But when they started out the season with a 2-and-6 record, it appeared this might be the year they stayed home.

Coach Chris Robertson's Lions have now won 11 of their last 14 games. And the way they played for all but three minutes of Monday night's 65-49 substate romp over Dubuque Hempstead, they looked invincible.

Playing a patented inside/out game to perfection on its home court, Linn-Mar (13-9) raced to a 30-9 second quarter lead over the undersized Mustangs (4-18).

It looked to be a laugher until Hempstead closed out the half on a 10-0 run.

"It's human nature that we relaxed a bit with that big lead," Robertson acknowledged afterward. "We took some quick shots, made some lazy passes and lost the momentum.

"We've got to eliminate those kind of things in order to move on."

Linn-Mar will face Pleasant Valley (14-6) in the substate semifinals Friday night at Pleasant Valley.

It was reassuring, Robertson said, when his team came out of the gate with five quick points to open the second half.

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"We answered right back in the third quarter," he said. "But we need to stay consistent for the whole game."

Their start Monday night in the opening round of the substate could not have been scripted any better. The Lions start four players 6-foot-4 or taller. The Mustangs, meanwhile, use a four-guard lineup with a 6-foot-5 center.

"We knew we had a big size advantage," said 6-foot-8 Linn-Mar post man Derik Gogg. "The idea was to get the ball inside and then work it outside to the open shooters."

Gogg scored the first two baskets of the game, one on a nifty left-handed spin under the bucket and the second on a putback after the first of his 10 rebounds. That opened up the outside.

And in quick order, laser-like sharpshooter Jordan Bohannon knocked in two 3-pointers and a jump shot in between to put his team ahead by 11. "The guys did a great job finding me in the open and kicking the ball out," said the freshman point guard.

Bohannon ended the night with four treys and a team-high 20 points. Working down low, Gogg had 15 points.

Sophomore long-range shooting specialist Nic Uhlir came off the bench early, made one pass but then drained the first of his two 3-pointers within 15 seconds of entering the game. He finished with 10 points.

"Nic did a nice job pushing the ball upcourt and getting me the ball," Bohannon said.

For the game, Linn-Mar shot 50 percent on 20 of 40 attempts (including seven for 15 from behind the arc). Hempstead was 19 for 47 (40 percent), but missed all eight of its shots from

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long distance.

The Lions outrebounded the Mustangs, 29-19.

“We didn’t want to give them any second chances,” said Gogg. “We wanted to get the ball and run with it.”

Linn-Mar needs two more victories to earn another trip to Des Moines for the state tournament.

“We’re getting better as the season has gone along,” Robertson said. “We’ve got some young guys and some real good seniors. They’re all playing well together.”

As one of the senior leaders, Gogg agrees.

“We’ve got to work on the mental lapses,” he said. “But our team chemistry is really high right now.”

DUBUQUE HEMPSTEAD (49): Kevin Thurmon 4 1-2 9, Jake Weber 3 4-5 10, Josh Dolson 3 4-5 10, Chris Francis 3 0-0 6, Ty Putchio 2 2-2 6, Austin Newkirk 1 0-0 2, Martell Wilson 2 0-0 4, Josh Carter 1 0-0 2, Casey Link 0 0-0 0, JJ Breittfelder 0 0-0 0, Nick Klein 0 0-0 0, Keaun Arnold 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 11-14 49.

LINN-MAR (65): Matt Lassen 3 0-0 6, Jordan Bohannon 6 4-4 20, Jon Schlotterback 1 2-2 4, Jimmy Roth 3 2-2 9, Derik Gogg 5 5-6 15, Nic Uhler 2 4-4 10, Matt Meier 0 1-2 1, Zach Martins 0 0-0 0, Nate Dick 0 0-0 0, Jack Strellner 0 0-0 0, Lane Halupnik 0 0-0 0, Ben Larson 0 0-0 0, Caleb Nelson 0 0-0 0, Ryan Schmidt 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 18-20 65.

Halftime – Linn-Mar 32, Hempstead 21. 3-point goals – Hempstead none, Linn-Mar 7

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(Bohannon 4, Uhlir 2, Roth 1). Fouled out – Roth.