

Tough Wash girls earn trip to state

Written by Jim Ecker

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ANKENY - Cedar Rapids Washington Coach Frank Howell read the girls on his basketball team a 10-page paper on toughness a few weeks ago.

The lesson paid off beautifully Tuesday night.

The Warriors carved their way through several layers of adversity and whipped No.6 Waukee, 61-54, in the Class 5A regional finals to earn a spot in the state tournament next week in Des Moines.

Washington (17-6) will face second-ranked Ankeny (19-4) in the opening round next Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. at Wells Fargo Arena.

Washington survived severe foul problems and some controversial calls, one of which resulted in an irate Howell getting a technical foul. The Warriors also survived a knee injury to Madison Kramer that left her in tears (she later returned to action) to nab the school's 12th trip to state.

The Washington girls yelled and screamed in delight when the game ended, took a minute to shake hands with the Waukee players, then raced to the locker room at Ankeny High School, where they yelled and screamed some more.

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Howell talked to them for a few minutes behind closed doors, then they all returned to the floor to celebrate with family and friends and pose for pictures.

"I just can't believe what happened. I'm so excited!" said Colby Bjornsen, who hit a pair of skyscraper 3-pointers at absolutely clutch times for the Warriors.

"I'm so happy. So happy," said Aleena Hobbs. "It's awesome."



The fireworks began with 11.2 seconds left in the first quarter when Washington center Abby Herb was called for her third personal foul on a debatable charging violation. Howell exploded off the bench, yelled at the officials and was called for a technical foul.

"Yeah, that kind of got me a little charged up," he said later.

Waukee (17-6) rode the technical free throws to an eight-point spurt and a 20-18 lead, wiping out Washington's earlier 18-12 advantage. The fight was on from there.

Washington grabbed the lead, Waukee grabbed the lead, Washington grabbed the lead again.

Waukee owned a slim 30-29 edge at intermission, then Taylor Wingert nailed a trio of 3-pointers to start the third quarter to give Waukee a 39-31 lead and all the momentum.

That's when Washington's toughness came into play. Waukee had beaten the Warriors 62-61

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at Waukee on Jan. 26, but Washington was determined it wasn't going to happen again.

The Warriors remembered that 10-page paper about toughness that Howell read to them a few weeks ago. They put those words into action.

"I think it kind of stuck in our brains," said Dani Franklin. "That was kind of our theme: Toughness. We were going to win on toughness."

Howell said he "stole" that 10-page paper off the Internet. It was written by Jay Bilas, a former All-American and college basketball analyst on television.

Toughness is not putting on an act and pretending to be tough, Bilas wrote. Toughness is doing what needs to be done under adverse conditions.

"The people who are really tough are the people who are willing to do things that they don't want to do when things aren't going the right way," said Howell, summarizing the paper.

Devin Glenski hit her third triple of the game for Washington and Hobbs made a layup to tie the game 41-41. Waukee spurted to a 45-41 lead, but Hobbs nailed a 3-pointer and Bjornsen (all 105 pounds of her) launched one of her skyscrapers for a 47-45 edge late in the third quarter.

"I don't think I ever learned how to shoot," said Bjornsen with a smile, trying to explain her unusual style. "I do what I do."

Waukee tied the game again, 47-47, but Bjornsen delivered another skyscraper for a 50-47 lead early in the fourth period. Bjornsen then made a quick move to the bucket for a 52-47 edge.

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Waukee made it 52-49, but Hobbs scored to make it 54-49. The Warriors held on defense and Hobbs hit two free throws for a 56-49 margin with 1:38 left.

Franklin got loose behind Waukee's press and hit an open layup for a 58-49 lead with 63 seconds remaining and the visitors from Cedar Rapids could smell victory. A minute later it was all theirs.

Herb scored 11 quick points in the first quarter before getting into foul trouble. She collected her fourth foul in the final second of the third period, but kept her head and never fouled out. She finished with a team-best 13 points and helped with rebounding and defense.

She was the victim of a controversial call, yet was tough enough to play through it.

"I just had to let it go," she said. "I couldn't keep that in my mind, I couldn't let it ride my game for the rest of the night."

Franklin scored 12 points, Bjornsen finished with 11 (all in the second half), Glenski scored nine points, Hobbs had eight points and Kramer netted six markers.

Britney Boland poured in 15 points in the first half for Waukee, but she scored only five points in the second half and finished with 20. Wingert scored 16.

Washington won state titles in 1988 and 1995 and finished second in 2005, 2006 and 2008. They reached the state tournament in 2011 when the current seniors were in the 10th grade.

"I'm so excited for the state tournament. I can't wait until Wednesday!" said Herb.

"Awesome," said Hobbs.

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WAUKEE (54): Boland 5 8-10 20, Bunz 1 0-0 2, Cavanaugh 0 0-0 0, Dalsing 3 0-0 7, Hunzeker 0 0-0 0, Kollmorgen 0 0-0 0, Ripperger 0 0-0 0, Shryack 3 2-4 9, Wingert 5 3-4 16. Totals 17 13-18 54.

WASHINGTON (61): Bjornsen 4 1-2 11, Cook 1 0-0 2, Franklin 5 1-1 12, Glenski 3 0-0 9, Herb 6 1-2 13, Hobbs 2 3-4 8, Kamin 0 0-0 0, Kramer 2 1-3 6, Malcolm 0 0-0 0. Totals 23 7-12 61.

Halftime - Waukee 30, Washington 29. 3-point goals - Waukee 7 (Wingert 3, Boland 2, Dalsing 1, Shryack 1), Washington 8 (Glenski 3, Bjorsen 2, Franklin 1, Hobbs 1, Kramer 1).