

Warriors fall short to No.3 Bobcats

Written by Jim Ecker

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EPWORTH - Cedar Rapids Washington's improbable dream of reaching the state basketball tournament just a year after suffering through a winless campaign came to an end Friday night.

The Warriors went down to defeat, but they went down fighting.

Washington overcame one big deficit Friday but could not overcome another and lost to No.3 Western Dubuque, 63-52, in the Class 4A substate semifinals.

The Warriors had to face an undefeated team on its home court in Epworth, but the game was tied 40-40 late in the third quarter and you couldn't tell the undefeated squad from the club with a losing record.

"We were coming up here to knock them off," said Washington point guard Austin Bergstrom. "We were just going to keep battling."

Washington Coach Adam Sanchez felt his team was in good shape with a 40-40 tie late in the third quarter, but a defensive rebound slipped away from the Warriors and T.J. Lake nailed a 3-pointer to give Western Dubuque a 43-40 lead.

The Bobcats (22-0) scored the last six points of the period for a 46-40 advantage and the Warriors (7-16) never got closer than four points again.

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The Warriors left the gym unhappy, but proud of their accomplishments this season after starting the year with a 1-14 record.

"I told them that I appreciate all their efforts," said Sanchez, Washington's first-year head coach. "It would have been really easy to give up on the season when we were 1-and-14 and things weren't going as easy as we hoped they would.

"I just thanked them for all their efforts and believing in us and what we were trying to sell them."

Washington grabbed a 15-10 lead in the first quarter on a 3-pointer by Jake Kramer. The Warriors led the No.3 team in the state, 17-14, after the initial period, but Western Dubuque outscored the visitors 20-10 in the second quarter for a 34-27 edge at intermission.

The Bobcats surged to a 38-29 lead in the third quarter and appeared on the verge of putting the game away, but the Warriors responded with an 11-2 spurt to knot matters at 40-40 on a pair of free throws by Brock Butterfield.

The game slipped away from there as Washington continued to allow too many offensive rebounds and second-chance points for the Bobcats.

"If you give a team that shoots it that well multiple opportunities on a possession, there's going to make them, especially when they have the caliber of players they do," said Sanchez. "They're as good a ballclub as we've seen all year and we've seen some really good ones."

Western Dubuque pounded the Warriors, 63-39, when they meet Jan. 5 in Cedar Rapids. The Warriors closed the gap to 11 points, but it wasn't enough.

"After our first performance against them, they kind of beat up on us," said Butterfield. "We

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wanted to come up here and get some revenge."

For awhile, it looked like they might.

"We kind of needed an off-night from them," said Bergstrom.

Sophomore Spencer Haldeman scored 15 points for Western Dubuque in the first half and finished with 17 markers. Lake had trouble getting started against tight man-to-man pressure from Butterfield and Bergstrom, but he made some key buckets in the second half and scored 16 points.

The Bobcats also got 10 points apiece from Nick Webber and Brendan McCoy.

Kramer and Peter Holmes led Washington with 11 points apiece. Butterfield scored nine points, David Rosenthal scored eight points and Holmes grabbed eight rebounds.

Sanchez had five seniors in his starting lineup Friday and will need to find a new quintet next season, but he thinks the Warriors have built a foundation for better things to come.

"Hopefully we can score a little bit more next year than we did this year," he said.

Sanchez said the team grew closer as the losses began to mount. They kept working hard and won six of their final eight games, but now it's over.

"That's the hardest part for this team, just to understand that tomorrow we don't get to go to practice and we don't get to be around each other at practice," he said. "That's the hard part for us."

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Butterfield thinks the seniors began a new legacy at Washington. "We proved a lot of people wrong. We shocked a lot of teams," he said.

Bergstrom agreed.

"I think we got it rolling," said Bergstrom, who hopes to play college soccer next year. "We exceeded expectations. Nobody thought we'd get seven wins or get a substate win, so that's really good for us."

WASHINGTON (52): Anderson 0 0-0 0, Bergstrom 1 2-2 5, Butterfield 2 4-4 9, Taylor 1 0-0 2, Rosenthal 4 0-0 8, Holmes 4 3-6 11, Oney 1 0-0 2, Kramer 4 0-0 11, Clark 2 0-0 4. Totals 19 9-12 52.

WESTERN DUBUQUE (63): Haldeman 5 5-5 17, Lake 5 4-4 16, Kramer 0 0-0 0, Webber 4 2-4 10, McCoy 3 3-4 10, Baumhover 0 1-4 1, Burds 2 1-2 5, Samson 1 1-2 3. Totals 20 17-25 62.

Halftime - Western Dubuque 34, Washington 27. 3-point goals - Washington 5 (Kramer 3, Bergstrom 1, Butterfield 1), Western Dubuque 5 (Haldeman 2, Lake 2, McCoy 1).