

Stokes keeps Linn-Mar's dream alive at state

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES -- Kiah Stokes did not play a spectacular game at the state basketball tournament Wednesday, but she was spectacular in the final 30 seconds.

That was enough to keep Linn-Mar's dream alive of winning back-to-back state titles.

Stokes scored the go-ahead basket with 20 seconds left and blocked Ankeny's final shot at victory, giving the second-ranked Lions a tense 48-47 victory in the quarterfinals of the 4A state tournament at Wells Fargo Arena.

Linn-Mar (22-2) will face No.3 Iowa City West (22-2) in the semifinals Friday at noon.

Linn-Mar trailed, 47-46, following a three-point play by Ankeny's Maddie Manning with 30.3 seconds left, putting the defending champs in jeopardy of a quick exit. That's when Stokes took over.

The Lions lobbed the in-bounds pass to her near the Ankeny foul line, and in most cases the 6-foot-3 center would hand the ball to one of the guards. Ankeny took that option away, so Stokes brought the ball up court herself.

She got there and saw an opening.

"I saw one of their girls start to help (on defense), but she went away," said Stokes. "That was kind of my key to just continue going toward the basket."

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She made a spin move and scored, giving Linn-Mar its 48-47 advantage, but there were still 20 seconds to go. As it turned out, it was a scary 20 seconds for the Lions.

Manning shot and missed, but got the rebound. She shot and missed again, but Ankeny got the ball again. Manning took a third shot, Stokes blocked it, there was contact, the ball hit Manning's leg and went out of bounds with 0.5 seconds remaining.

No foul was called.

"You mean the non-call?" said Ankeny Coach Scott DeJong. "No comment.

"We had like three or four shots at the end," said DeJong, deciding to comment a little further. "We kept getting the rebound and fighting. There was certainly a lot of contact, it seems like. So ... I'll be quiet."

Ankeny fans booed lustily.

"It was definitely physical," said Stokes, recalling the final play. "I can't really remember it too much. I just remember the ball going everywhere."

Everywhere but in the basket.

"There's no doubt there was contact," said Manning. "I mean, they called that at the beginning of the game, and then they didn't call it. You can't control that, but at the same time, it's hard to take like that."

Stokes finished with 18 points, 11 rebounds and two blocked shots, exceptional by most standards but beneath her season averages in all three categories. She shot 8 for 18 from the

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field and missed several shots from close range, but the McDonald's All-American came through in the final 30 seconds.

"Just incredible," said Linn-Mar Coach Mike Brandt. "That shows how much she's grown over the four years. Just to say I'm going to take that ball and I'm going to take it down and put that shot up, and then come back and play 'D'."

Manning had a different perspective on Linn-Mar's game-winning bucket by Stokes.

"It was a defensive breakdown on our part," said Manning. "That shouldn't happen. No player, I don't care who they are, should be able to dribble all the way down the court and get a layup. We had three people there and she put the shot in."

Linn-Mar advanced despite an unusual batch of assist-to-turnover statistics. The Lions had a poor 1-to-2 ratio of nine assists and 18 turnovers, while Ankeny had an excellent ratio of 2-to-1 with 14 assists and seven turnovers.

The Hawkettes attempted 21 more shots than Linn-Mar and made three more field goals (including a four-to-one advantage in 3-pointers), but the Lions prevailed with a 13-3 edge at the foul line and a 35-25 margin in rebounds.

Linn-Mar got a big boost off the bench from Shanice Cheatham and Courtney Major, who combined for 16 points and gave the Lions a 16-0 bulge in bench points. "That was huge," said Brandt.

Jenna Eeels scored nine points for Linn-Mar. Kailee Karr grabbed seven rebounds for the Lions, Cheatham had six rebounds and Rachel Thrune collected five.

Manning led Ankeny (20-4) with 16 points, seven rebounds, six assists and three steals. Shayla Starkenburg scored 13 for the 10th-ranked Hawkettes.

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ANKENY (47): Madi Robson 2 0-0 6, Maddie Manning 7 2-3 16, Shayla Starkenburg 6 1-2 13, Maddie Muhlenbruck 2 0-0 6, Krista Pettepier 3 0-0 6, Cameron Smith 0 0-0 0, Brittany Hedrick 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 3-5 47.

LINN-MAR (48): Mykaela Brandt 0 0-0 0, Rachel Thrune 0 2-2 2, Kailee Karr 1 1-2 3, Jenna Eells 2 4-4 9, Kiah Stokes 8 2-5 18, Shanice Cheatham 3 3-4 9, Courtney Major 3 1-2 7. Totals 17 13-19 48.

Halftime -- Linn-Mar 22, Ankeny 20. 3-point goals -- Ankeny 4 (Robson 2, Muhlenbruck 2), Linn-Mar 1 (Eells).