

Lions upend Solon at own tourney

Written by Tom Fruehling

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With four ranked teams in the 12-school field, Linn-Mar was far from being favored to win its own invitational volleyball tournament Saturday.

But the upstart Lions did perhaps the next best thing, pulling off the meet's biggest upset by upending previously unbeaten proverbial powerhouse Solon, 2-0.

The Spartans, ranked No.1 in Class 4A, had won their first 12 matches this season before falling to Linn-Mar, 21-18, 21-18, in the quarterfinal round.

The Lions (7-6) dropped their next match to eventual tourney champion Dubuque Hempstead, hardly enough to temper their high spirits.

"We just clicked completely as a team against Solon," said senior power hitter Aryn Jones. "We finally all came together. It was the best we've played this season."

Always tough Solon had cruised so far this year, including a relatively easy win over Xavier last Saturday to claim the Cedar Rapids Washington Invitational title.

Linn-Mar more than gave them a run for their money, though.

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By effectively blocking the trio of big hitters on Solon's front line, the Lions avoided the onslaught of kills that are the Spartans' stock-in-trade. They recorded seven blocks in the two games, the most they've had in a match this year.

"We've had some difficulty with our blocks, and we've been working on it in practice," Jones said. "It really helps the defense set things up."

Both games between Linn-Mar and Solon were hard-fought right down to the wire.

Solon took a 16-15 lead in the first game on two monster kills, but the Lions scrapped back with four straight points and finished the upset.



Jones set the tone in the second game with a spike to put her team up 3-0. Solon rallied back, tying the game for the last time at 15-15 before Sarah Renner clinched the win with a dink shot to the corner.

"I thought we had the upper hand most of the way," Jones said. "We were mixing up our shots and kept them off balance. We seemed to have more drive."

Jones, along with Meg Gostonczik and Kristie Sommer, each had five kills in the match. Renner

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led her team with 11 assists.

Sami Boekhoff, the leader with three blocks, said the Lions seemed to lose some steam when they fell to Class 5A seventh-ranked Hempstead, 22-20, 21-12, in the semifinals.

"I think we kind of lost our mental toughness," she said. "We didn't seem as focused. But Solon and Dubuque are both really good teams. So this was a big step for us."

The other two Metro teams in the field didn't fare as well.

Prairie (4-5) was missing several of its players and split its four matches, losing to Class 5A fifth-ranked Pleasant Valley and dropping a 22-20, 24-22 heartbreaker to highly touted Muscatine.

The Marion Indians (5-6), ranked No.12 in Class 4A, lost to Solon and Muscatine but beat Waterloo East in the morning pool play. They took tourney winner Hempstead to three sets before dropping the rubber game, 15-9.

The upset-minded Marion girls took the first game 21-18, then slipped 21-13.

"That was our best match of the day," said Indians Coach Roxanne Paulsen. "Last week we really competed against Solon, but it was disappointing that we didn't do it today."

"We're still struggling a little, trying to fit the pieces together. But I think once we get a little success that will carry over and give us some confidence."

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POOL A - Solon (3-0), Muscatine (2-1), Marion (1-2), Waterloo East (0-3).

POOL B - Hempstead (3-0), Linn-Mar (2-1), IC Regina (1-2), Center Point-Urbana (0-3).

POOL C - Pleasant Valley (3-0), Prairie (2-1), Springville (1-2), Vinton-Shellsburg (0-3).

QUARTERFINALS

Hempstead def. Marion, 18-21, 21-13, 15-9

Pleasant Valley def. Regina, 21-13, 21-16

Muscatine def. Prairie, 22-20, 24-22

Linn-Mar def. Solon, 21-18, 21-18

SEMIFINALS

Hempstead def. Linn-Mar, 22-20, 21-12

Muscatine def. Pleasant Valley, 21-19, 21-13

FINALS

Hempstead def. Muscatine, 21-19, 21-12

POOL A

Solon def. Marion, 21-13, 21-9

Muscatine def. Waterloo East, 21-9, 21-11

Solon def. Muscatine, 22-20, 21-17

Marion def. Waterloo East, 21-12, 21-9

Solon def. Waterloo East, 21-13, 21-8

Muscatine def. Marion, 21-17, 21-16

POOL B

Hempstead def. Center Point-Urbana, 21-11, 21-10

Linn-Mar def. Regina, 21-16, 21-4

Hempstead def. Linn-Mar, 21-7, 21-16

Regina def. Center Point-Urbana, 21-17, 21-12

Hempstead def. Regina, 21-12, 21-13

Linn-Mar def. Center Point-Urbana, 21-16, 21-18

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POOL C

Prairie def. Vinton-Shellsburg, 21-18, 21-13

Pleasant Valley def. Springville, 21-11, 21-6

Prairie def. Springville, 21-11, 21-12

Pleasant Valley def. Vinton-Shellsburg, 21-5, 21-12

Pleasant Valley def. Prairie, 21-12, 21-19

Springville def. Vinton-Shellsburg, 21-16, 21-17