

## Lions facing different Iowa City West team

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 10 March 2011 17:07 - Last Updated Thursday, 10 March 2011 21:34

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DES MOINES -- Iowa City West Coach Steve Bergman was not a happy guy two months ago after the Trojans lost back-to-back games to Cedar Rapids Washington and Cedar Rapids Jefferson.

In the first game, Wes Washpun banked in a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give Washington a 54-52 victory. Four days later, West lost to Jefferson in double-overtime after Jarrod Uthoff saved the J-Hawks in the final seconds of regulation with an off-balance 3-pointer.

Those two losses -- both in Cedar Rapids -- dropped Iowa City West to 4-4, but something very interesting has happened to the Trojans since then. They have not lost again.

Iowa City West (20-4) will face No.1 Linn-Mar (24-0) in the semifinals of the Class 4A state tournament Friday afternoon at 1:30 at Wells Fargo Arena.

Ankeny (20-4) will meet Des Moines Hoover (22-2) in the other semifinal at 3:15 p.m. Friday. The championship game is scheduled for Saturday night at 8:05.

Iowa City West has won 16 straight games. If the Trojans win their 17th straight on Friday, it would vault the fourth-ranked Trojans into the state finals.

"Believe it or not -- and I'm not sure I believed it when I said it, up in that locker room at Jefferson after that second bad loss -- I said, 'If you guys don't want to lose again this year, you don't have to,' " Bergman remarked Wednesday.

"Like I said, I don't know if I believed it when I said it, but that's what we said. But we said we had to make a few little changes. Just attitude, mostly, and the way we practiced. Those kind of things."

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Iowa City West has a young team, with three sophomores and freshman Wyatt Lohaus in key roles. The Trojans looked like a green, inexperienced squad when they got drilled by Linn-Mar, 67-43, back on Dec. 10 in Iowa City.

That was three months ago. They've grown up since then.

"When we played them the first time, we weren't ready," said Bergman. "That was our third or fourth game, and I knew we weren't ready.

"We're more ready," he said. "I don't know if we're ready, but we're more ready now."

Iowa City West hasn't lost since Jan. 7, but Linn-Mar hasn't lost since the semifinals of the 2010 state tournament last March. The Lions are 24-0 and seeking their third state title in eight years.

Iowa City West faces a big challenge in the semifinals Friday. "You had to remind me. I'm not sleeping anyway," cracked Bergman.

Bergman and Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson have seen a lot of each other in Mississippi Valley Conference games over the years. This is Bergman's 21st year as the head coach at Iowa City West and this is Robertson's sixth season as the boss at Linn-Mar.

Linn-Mar topped Cedar Rapids Washington, 71-54, in the first round of the 4A tournament Wednesday, then Robertson and the Lions stuck around and watched Iowa City West beat Waukee, 57-47.

"I'm happy for them. That's a good win for them," said Robertson. "They're playing well, so it will be a good test, it's a big challenge. They're playing as well as anybody. It will be fun, it will be exciting."

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Robertson planned to watch additional tape of Iowa City West Wednesday night before formulating a game plan.

"I know with them you're going to have to move the ball. They're going to defend you," he said. "You're going to have to rebound, do all the little things. And hopefully we can get some transition going and get the tempo going."

Senior Matt Bohannon sparked Linn-Mar in the quarterfinals against Washington with 32 points. Marcus Paige collected 14 points and seven assists, Shane Benton scored 10 points and Ian McBrayer snared 13 rebounds. Linn-Mar also got a boost from 6-foot-6 senior Josh Montague, who returned to the lineup and played 17 minutes after missing four games with a knee injury.

Sophomore Dondre Alexander paced Iowa City West in the opening round with 17 points against Waukee.