

Lions answer early wakeup call on Day 1

Written by Jim Ecker

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Some college basketball teams celebrate the first day of practice each year with "Midnight Madness," holding their initial workout for a new season at 12:01 a.m. and inviting their fans, pep band and cheerleaders to have a good time.

By contrast, the Linn-Mar Lions held their first practice for the 2013-14 high school season at 6 a.m. Monday in an otherwise quiet gym with perhaps a few sleepy players.

"Everybody was on time," said Coach Chris Robertson, happy with the response. "One was close, but he made it."

One player appeared to excuse himself for a few minutes to resolve a case of indigestion, but otherwise the workout went off without a hitch.

Linn-Mar normally practices after school, but it made more sense to practice in the morning this week.

"I'm glad it was in the morning," Robertson said when it was over. "I like having no distractions. Otherwise you have the sophomore coach talking, you have balls bouncing."

"It's nice to get their attention. I know it's early and it's hard on them, but it worked out good."

Jordan Printy, one of the assistant coaches for the varsity, also coaches Linn-Mar eighth

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graders, who are finishing their season this week with after-school activities. Printy did not want to miss the first week of practice with the varsity, so the whistle blew at 6 a.m. Monday for the first drills of the year.

"They worked hard," Robertson said. "The concentration factor is a challenge the first day. I think your body gets tired, no matter how good a shape you're in.

"I thought the energy was good, the effort was good. We'll have to keep getting better."

Robertson tabbed Iowa City West and Dubuque Senior as the teams to beat in the Mississippi Valley Conference, but he likes his group following a 13-10 finish last season.

"I think Iowa City West and Dubuque Senior are probably clear favorites, but I think after that I hope we're right in that mix," he said. "I think we'll have good depth. I think we'll have 10-11-12 guys play.

"We won't be real big, but hopefully we can get up and down," he said. "I'm excited. It's a fun group. They're very coachable kids. They work hard, play together. Those are good things to have going into the season."

Jimmy Roth, Matt Lassen, Derik Gogg, Matt Meier and six other seniors graduated. The top returning scorer is Jordan Bohannon, the fourth of the Bohannon brothers who averaged 8.0 points last season as just a freshman.

Bohannon held his own as a ninth grader and appears bigger and stronger this year.

"He's grown. He's a little over 6-feet, maybe 6-1 now," Robertson said. "Obviously we're going to lean on him to have a good year.

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"I thought he did really well (last year). He learned as he went, he became a good leader for a freshman. I think that year of on-court experience at the varsity level - with practices every day, the competition - will really pay off for him this year.

"He struggled at times last year," Robertson said, "but he was small and young. Now he's older and a little more mature. There's no doubt he can play the game. I think he'll be a lot more comfortable his sophomore year."

Jon Schlotterback, Nic Uhlir, Ben Larson, Ryan Schmidt and Lane Halupnik return this year after gaining valuable experience. Riley Murphy and Jordan Brant, part of the sophomore class with Bohannon, have been promoted to the varsity to bolster the club.

"Our guards are still a little young, but very, very, skilled," Robertson remarked. "Good leaders, good kids."

Linn-Mar will play the Marion Indians in the Metro Sports Report Classic on Saturday, Nov. 30 at Kirkwood Community College in a Hall of Pride game at 1:15 p.m. The Lions will open the regular season on Tuesday, Dec. 3 by hosting Waukee.