

UNI coach impressed with Bohannon's skills

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Linn-Mar Lions wore the biggest smiles Saturday night after they won the Class 4A state basketball title.

The second-biggest smile belonged to University of Northern Iowa Coach Ben Jacobson. He hit the jackpot in Des Moines.

On Friday night, UNI signee Seth Tuttle led West Fork to the Class 2A title. Then on Saturday night, UNI signee Matt Bohannon helped Linn-Mar win the 4A crown.

Jacobson was there both nights, cheering for his future Panthers, envisioning them in Purple and Gold.

Tuttle, a 6-foot-8 forward, and Bohannon, a 6-4 guard, were delighted to see Jacobson, who had a floor pass and congratulated his prized recruits at Wells Fargo Arena.

Jacobson saw Bohannon torch Cedar Rapids Washington for a career-best 32 points in the quarterfinals Wednesday and saw him scorch Des Moines Hoover for 25 in the finals. Jacobson missed Bohannon's performance in the semifinals Friday afternoon because UNI had practice in Cedar Falls, but a Panther assistant coach was there.

Bohannon was named the captain of the Class 4A all-tournament team and was named the MVP for the entire tournament, regardless of class.

"The thing that we're most excited about is, Matt just keeps getting better and better all the time. He's obviously worked at it," said Jacobson. "He's a competitive kid, he's an unselfish kid, and winning is the most important thing to him."

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"A lot of the qualities that are hard to find, he's got them," said Jacobson. "And on top of that, he's a good player."

Bohannon averaged 25 points in the state tournament, significantly higher than his 17-point average during the regular season for the top-ranked Lions. He produced when Linn-Mar needed him most.

"He knows how to play," said Jacobson. "His team is good enough, some nights he's got to get 25 and a lot of nights he doesn't. So he just does everything that he feels he needs to do to win."

Bohannon demonstrated his all-around game at the state tournament. He grabbed nine rebounds in the finals, played solid defense, handled the ball and shot extremely well. He was 9-for-10 from the floor in the first half against Washington.

"His versatility is really good," said Jacobson. "The thing he's improved the most in the last year-and-a-half or so is his handling the basketball."

"When he was a sophomore, he was more of a guy who could catch-and-shoot. Now he handles the ball well enough to create his own shot and create some opportunities for his teammates."

"And then he's really improved the efficiency of his jump shot," Jacobson continued. "He's a much more consistent 3-point shooter than he was a year ago or two years ago. Those type of things take hard work. And when you combine them, it allows him to be better and that much more productive and effective."

Jacobson has a track record of red-shirting true freshmen, giving them a year to develop before competing in the Missouri Valley Conference, but those decisions are made in preseason practice.

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"We'll make that decision later, with all the guys," he said. "We talked through both sides of it (with Bohannon) when we went through the recruiting process.

"We talked about playing as a freshman, we talked about red-shirting. But the decision won't be made until we get into practice."

Jacobson has signed five players for next season. In addition to Bohannon and Tuttle, he's signed 6-1 guard Deon Mitchell of Pflugerville, Texas; 6-2 guard JeVon Lyle of Kansas City; and 6-6 forward Marvin Singleton of Hopkins, Minn.

The Panthers hope to sign a center this spring. The Metro Sports Report has learned that UNI has not offered a scholarship to 6-9 Brennan Coughill, who is playing for Kirkwood Community College this season after spending one year at the University of Iowa.