

Linn-Mar girls nipped by Wahlert

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Ranked as high as fifth in the state two weeks ago, the Linn-Mar girls dropped their fourth straight game Friday night at home to an undersized Dubuque Wahlert squad that had trouble holding onto the ball or shooting straight.

“They played harder than us,” said frustrated Linn-Mar Coach Jaime (Printy) Brandt after the 34-33 lackluster loss. “We need a gut check. We have to figure out what’s going on.”

Wahlert (6-9) came into the game “struggling,” according to veteran Coach Kris Spiegler.

“We’ve been looking for our identity,” she said. “But, oh my gosh, this win is huge.”

After taking a quick 3-0 lead, the Golden Eagles trailed most of the way. With 11 turnovers in the first half alone (almost all on bad passes), they fell behind 21-11 at halftime and 27-13 soon after.

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Over an eight-minute span, though, the Lions frittered away their lead. They missed every shot they took, while Wahlert went on a 15-0 run to go ahead 28-27 with 5:20 to go.

“We didn’t run our offense very well,” said Brandt. “And we didn’t play with a sense of urgency.”

Playing with nobody over 5-foot-9, meanwhile, Wahlert dug its heels in on defense. “Our girls are resilient,” said Spiegler. “They’re gritty, and they keep fighting.”

They had just enough fight in them to hold on in the final two minutes after Jade Lynch sunk a 3-pointer to put them ahead 31-30.

Following a Linn-Mar miss, the Golden Eagles gave the ball right back when whistled for an illegal screen.

And with a minute left, Olivia Montague lifted the Lions back up 33-31 with a 3-pointer of her own from the left corner.

But just when it looked like the Lions (10-5) had dodged a bullet, Wahlert’s 5-foot-7 junior guard Ali Osterberger became a hero.

Finding herself wide open at the top of the key, she coolly dropped in yet another 3-pointer to

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put her team ahead with just six seconds left.

And when Linn-Mar's 6-foot-1 Amanda Ollinger took an inbound pass from Niki Sharma the full length of the floor for a potential go-ahead score, Osterberger got just enough in her way to cause Ollinger to miss a close shot at the buzzer.

"I'm used to guarding bigger girls," she said later. "I bodied her up and bothered her.

"We fought so hard and stuck with 'em. What a way to end."

Like the conductor of The Little Engine that Could, Coach Spiegler said the win showed that perseverance pays off.

"Ali's feisty, and she's aggressive. And like I told the girls, good defense will win games.

"All you need is one more point, and tonight we got it."

WAHLERT (34) – Jessalyn Roling 1 0-0 2, Ali Osterberger 2 2-2 7, Katy Fricano 0 0-0 0, Krystal Tranel 0 0-0 0, Jade Lynch 6 0-2 14, Kelly Boge 1 0-0 2, Ruther Berning 0 0-0 0, Charlotte Flynn 2 0-0 5, Amelia Noonan 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 2-8 34.

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Melissa Miller 15.5, Emily G. Dillingham 10.5, Jordan Finkbeiner 10, Megan M. Osterberg 8.1, Olivia