

## This wasn't your mother's brand of basketball

Written by Mark Dukes

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Until the 1970s, there were no girls basketball teams in the Metro area. When basketball was introduced here, it was the 6-on-6, two-court variety.

Forwards played offense, guards played defense and neither were allowed to cross half court. A girl could dribble no more than twice. Defenders touching the ball in the offensive player's hand were called for a foul.

My, how things have changed.

Twelve girls' basketball teams were involved in the 7th annual Rivalry Saturday at the U.S. Cellular Center Saturday. While watching a bit of the action, it was reinforced to me how far the girls have come in the full-court game.

Their athleticism is terrific. They jump, they run the floor, they see the court, they shoot from distance, they run complex offenses and defenses. Girls who played in the 1970s, and before, perhaps had some of those qualities but they were hamstrung by the two-court game.

Today's girls have skills galore.

The premier matchup Saturday involved two of the state's top teams -- Linn-Mar, ranked No. 2 in Class 4A, and Ballard, ranked No. 1 in Class 3A. It also showcased two of the nation's top recruits in Linn-Mar's 6-foot-3 Kiah Stokes and Ballard's 6-foot-2 Taylor Greenfield. Stokes is headed to Connecticut, Greenfield to Stanford.

"The girls athletes of today are stronger, quicker, faster and as a result there are players like Greenfield, my daughter, and Markisha Wright in Des Moines who end up with major-college opportunities," said Greg Stokes, former Iowa basketball star.

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Stokes and Greenfield weren't the only players on the floor who exhibited talent, but they were clearly the focus.

Stokes and Greenfield are different players. The 6-foot-3 Stokes is more of a center/forward while Greenfield, 6-foot-2, is a perimeter operator. Unexpectedly, though, they ended up opposing each other for much of the second half, at least when Ballard had the ball.

Stokes' perimeter defense on Greenfield in the second half was crucial to Linn-Mar's 50-40 victory. Greenfield went scoreless for the better part of a quarter and a half. From the mid-point of the third quarter until less than a minute remained, Greenfield got nothing.

"She's never played out there on the perimeter much," Stokes said of his daughter. "I'm sure they've practiced it. But at the next level, she's going to have to tighten up that part of her game. She's just not used to it in high school. She's very gifted but she has so much more to work on."

Not that Greenfield isn't special. She opened the game with a 3-pointer, then used a slick cross-over dribble to gain access to a jumper in the lane. Greenfield finished with 22 points and 10 rebounds despite a suffocating second half.

Stokes had a sub-par offensive game (10 points) as Ballard collapsed two or three girls on her each time down the court. But Stokes snared 16 rebounds, blocked five shots and was a physical presence.

She played all 32 minutes and much of her work looked effortless. Her three-point play off a screen and roll with 1:24 left was a thing of beauty, putting Linn-Mar up by nine points.

There was one similarity between this game and one in the 1970s, and that was the sparseness of fans. The 7,000-seat arena had no one seated in the upper two levels. Attendance was in the hundreds, a shame considering the caliber of play.

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But those who were there saw up close two players who will be on television the next four or five years, perhaps in a national championship setting. And they saw a collection of players throughout the day who demonstrated considerable talent.

No, it sure isn't your mother's or grandmother's brand of basketball anymore.