

Franklin leads Wash to Valley title with 35

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Washington Warriors did not look like Mississippi Valley Conference champions when they got drubbed by Iowa City High by 46 points in the season opener in December, but that was eons ago.

Their conference journey had a happy ending Friday night.

Dani Franklin poured in 35 points as the eighth-ranked Warriors clipped Jefferson, 79-65, to claim the outright Valley Division title in the MVC with a 12-1 league record.

Washington treated that miserable 73-27 loss to Iowa City High on Dec. 3 as a wakeup call.

"I think after that game we kind of regrouped and knew that we needed to improve and we could be much better than what we played that night," said Franklin, who came within two points of matching her career high.

"It feels really good," she about being division champs. "We're excited. It's a great accomplishment."

The Warriors won the title on Hall of Fame night at Washington. Someday, some of them could walk onto that court as new inductees and have the announcer brag about them.

"We'll be able to come back to these when some of our friends go into the Hall of Fame and think that we were conference champions. That's just awesome," said Aleena Hobbs, who had 13 points, seven rebounds, five steals and four assists.

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Washington Coach Frank Howell built his club around two aces with Franklin and Hobbs, complemented by a supporting cast that improved as the season went along. He was delighted to see them win an outright division title, especially after the inauspicious start in Iowa City.

"It's pretty amazing. It really is," he said. "I think the amazing thing is, it's not a weak division. There are some great teams in the division.

"You had to come out every night and play well and not stub your toe, because there are a lot of teams that could trip us up. And to not have to share it with anybody is pretty miraculous."

The Warriors finished one game ahead of sixth-ranked Waterloo West in the Valley Division standings, accomplished in part by winning their showdown in Waterloo.

Franklin, an all-state forward who will play Division I basketball at Valparaiso University, was aggressive from the opening tip and played one of the best games of her career. She scored 17 points in the first half and 18 in the second, maintaining her intensity from start to finish.

"I think I came out with a tougher mindset, knowing we would have to play them tough in order to win the game," she said. "I just went in there thinking, if we win this game we're going to be conference champs. It's exciting, because that's what we wanted to do."

The Warriors (17-4, 12-1) needed a big game from Franklin, because Jefferson (9-12, 6-7) gave them a good battle with 22 points from sophomore Amanda Ollinger and 19 from freshman Kennedy Dighton.

Every time the J-Hawks made a run at the Warriors, Franklin seemed to have an answer.

"She played unbelievable tonight," said Hobbs. "She was on and we were getting her the ball and she was finishing really well."

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Howell liked the way Franklin's unselfish teammates made major contributions to the victory.

"It was a special night for her, but they allowed it to be a special night," he said. "It turned out to be a special night for all of us."

Jefferson Coach Jason Edwards, formerly one of Howell's assistant coaches at Washington, saluted his old boss for winning the division title. "He's an awesome coach," said Edwards. "He gets the best out of his kids, and you know year-in and year-out they're going to be near the top of the league."

Jefferson point guard Avery Guy sprained an ankle late in the third quarter and did not return, but she was able to put pressure on her ankle after the game as she left the gym.

JEFFERSON (65): Starks 1 0-0 3, Rolwes 0 0-0 0, Kitterman 0 1-2 1, Blietz 2 5-8 9, Veglahn 0 0-0 0, Guy 0 0-0 0, Kuba 2 2-2 7, Carter 0 0-0 0, Brathwaite 2 0-0 4, Dahlen-Zeck 0 0-0 0, Dighton 7 3-3 19, Ollinger 6 9-14 22. Totals 20 20-29 65.

WASHINGTON (79): Clark 1 1-1 4, Cook 2 0-0 5, Hobbs 4 5-6 13, Jones 2 0-0 4, Semrau 1 1-2 4, Hartman 0 0-0 0, Squires 0 0-0 0, West-Doyle 2 0-1 4, Franklin 13 6-7 35, O'Donnell 1 3-5 5, Kamin 0 0-0 0, Ochs 1 0-0 3, Visser 1 0-0 2. Totals 28 16-22 79.

Halftime - Washington 39, Jefferson 31. 3-point goals - Jefferson 5 (Dighton 2, Starks 1, Kuba 1, Ollinger 1), Washington - 7 (Franklin 3, Clark 1, Cook 1, Semrau 1, Ochs 1).