

Lassen, Roth pace Lions by Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 29 January 2013 23:42 -

Matt Lassen and Jimmy Roth have a lot in common.

Both of them are talented 6-foot-5 seniors, both of them will continue their basketball careers in college next season, and both of them have spent most of their high school careers as complementary role players on highly successful Linn-Mar teams.

Their roles have changed this season, however. Now they have to be leaders as the Lions aim for their 10th straight trip to the Class 4A state tournament.

If Lassen and Roth keep playing like they did Tuesday night, they might get there.

Lassen tossed in 20 points and Roth scored 17 as Linn-Mar bopped Kennedy, 70-50, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Kennedy.

The Lions (8-8, 7-4) raced to a 23-6 lead after the first quarter and were never seriously threatened by the slumping Cougars (9-6, 6-5).

Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson has talked to all his players about taking leadership roles this season, with the onus falling mainly on the seniors.

"We were on everybody pretty good about leadership," said Robertson. "We lost a great leader in Marcus Paige. He did so many things for us, on and off the court, and before him Matt Bohannon and on down the line. We've had great leaders."

Lassen and Roth have evolved into the role.

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"That was something those guys had to learn, because they hadn't had to do it as much and it wasn't natural. And it's not easy," said Robertson. "I think that part has come along."

Lassen enjoys being a leader on the club.

"It's been fun, to be honest," he said. "It's not so much the scoring. It's being a positive leader and being a good mentor and mentoring the younger kids, as my mentors did for me over the years. That's the biggest thing to me."

Roth agreed with his coach: It's not easy being a leader after deferring to other people over the years.

"I think it was tough, especially after Marcus and his years. No one can do what he did," said Roth. "But we're trying the best we can and I think we're starting to figure it out with each other."

Lassen, who plans to sign a Division I scholarship with Albany (N.Y.) this spring, is averaging 12.0 points per game. Roth, who has signed a D-II scholarship with Upper Iowa, is averaging 12.4 points after missing the first four games of the season.

They combined for 37 points Tuesday with good shooting and slick moves to the basket. Jordan Bohannon contributed 12 points and hit eight straight free throws in the final 2:21 as Kennedy tried to get back in the game by fouling.

Derik Gogg helped Linn-Mar get off to a fast start with eight points in the first half. Nick Uhlir also pitched in eight points as the Lions played one of their best games of the season.

"That was the best 32 minutes that we've moved the ball from side to side on offense," said Robertson. "We didn't quick-shoot it too much."

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The Lions began the season with a 2-6 record, but they've reversed that and posted a 6-2 mark in their last eight games to reach .500 for the season. It's a far cry from Linn-Mar's cumulative record of 208-26 the past nine years, but it's not too late to make a run toward Des Moines and a 10th straight state tournament.

Lassen and Roth are not hunting for their own points, but they know it's easier on the rest of the club if they lead the way.

"The younger guys kind of look toward me and Jimmy. We're experienced," said Lassen. "We try to get our points, but also distribute the ball."

"When me and Jimmy are putting up good points like that and the other guys are contributing, we can play with just about anybody."

Kennedy made only one field goal in the first quarter while falling behind 23-6. Lassen scored seven straight points during a stretch in the second quarter to give the Lions a 20-point bulge at 41-21.

Blake Murdock got hot for Kennedy and the Cougars pulled within 60-50 with two minutes left, but Linn-Mar made all its free throws when it counted and won comfortably.

The Lions went 20 for 22 at the foul line and made eight 3-pointers.

Murdock scored 19 points for Kennedy and Anthony Carter had 10. The Cougars lost their third game in a row.

LINN-MAR (70): Uhlir 2 2-2 8, Martins 0 0-0 0, Eby 0 0-0 0, Dick 0 0-0 0, Lassen 6 6-6 20, Bohannon 1 9-10 12, Schlotterback 1 0-0 2, Strellner 0 0-0 0, Roth 7 1-2 17, Halupnik 0 0-0 0,

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Meier 1 0-0 3, Larson 0 0-0 0, Gogg 3 2-2 8, Schmidt 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 20-22 70.

KENNEDY (50): B.Murdock 7 3-4 19, Carter 4 2-2 10, Fuller 0 0-0 0, Bardsley 3 0-0 6, Buck 0 0-0 0, Martin 0 1-2 1, Koelling 1 2-2 4, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Holzer 1 0-0 2, Heitland 0 0-0 0, Struss 4 0-0 8, Gilmore 0 0-0 0, Jacobus 0 0-0 0, Oltman 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 8-10 50.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 34, Kennedy 19. 3-point goals - Linn-Mar 8 (Uhlir 2, Lassen 2, Roth 2, Bohannon 1, Meier 1), Kennedy 2 (Murdock 2).