

Lions' Uhler stands tall in win over Cougars

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Listed at 5-foot-10, Linn-Mar reserve point guard Nic Uhler may stand that tall on his tippy-toes.

But the sophomore shooting specialist is playing big at just the right time.

Averaging just 4.8 points a game in part-time play, he pumped in 17 Tuesday with five 3-pointers in a 65-41 win over Dubuque Wahlert.

He followed that up Friday night at home with another team-high 16 points on four more long-range bombs to lead the Lions past Kennedy, 57-42.

"He may not be the biggest guy on the court," said Coach Chris Robertson of his late-season scoring sensation. "But he plays with a big heart.

"He's fearless out there. That's what I love about him"

Coming off the bench late in the first quarter, Uhler hit three-straight looping two-handed treys in the span of two minutes to spark a 13-0 Linn-Mar run. When he surprisingly put the ball on the floor and drove for a layup with a minute to go in the half, the Lions took a 27-10 lead they didn't come close to losing.

Peaking just as post-season action approaches, Linn-Mar (11-8, 10-4 MVC) has now won nine of the last 11 games, nine straight in the conference.

"We're playing with a lot of confidence right now," said Robertson. "Finally.

"Early in the season we were losing a lot of close games. Now that we've started winning some,

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we're on the right track."

So is his substitute gunslinger.

Entering Friday's game, Uhlir had made 26 of 55 field goals on the year for 47.3 percent. But 21 of those baskets were 3-pointers; he was shooting 56.7 percent behind the arc.

"I'm a shooter," he said after his latest five-for-seven performance. "I'll shoot it whenever I'm open. Tonight I was open, and the guys did a great job getting me the ball."

The diminutive sharpshooter is a veteran of summer-league AAU basketball, starting with the All-Iowa Attack team out of Ames in the fourth grade.

He played on the Lion sophomore squad last year as a freshman and began this season mostly as a sub for freshman point guard Jordan Bohannon.

Of late, Robertson has been putting both youngsters in the line-up at the same time.

"They blend well," the coach said. "They're both very good ball handlers, and they're both good shooters. It's nice to have them in there, especially late in the game."

Having already defeated Kennedy (10-8, 7-7) by 20 points only two weeks ago, the Lions' rematch Friday was pretty much decided early on.

The Cougars took a 4-2 lead but didn't score again for five minutes while Linn-Mar ran off 10 straight points.

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When Uhlir got hot, the Lions took a 27-14 lead at halftime.

The third period was something of a helter-skelter affair, which seemed to suit Kennedy. The Lions went five minutes without a field goal but still maintained a 13-point margin going into the final period.

“Even when we had a couple of lapses on offense,” said Roberston, “I thought we continued to guard real well. To hold Kennedy in the low 40s is pretty good.”

Linn-Mar takes its winning streak to Dubuque Hempstead next Tuesday, then finishes at home two nights later against Iowa City West.

“We’ve got a tough road,” said the ever-confident Uhlir, “but our team chemistry is way up.”

KENNEDY (42): Blake Murdock 2 3-4 7, Anthony Carter 3 0-0 7, Johnathon Koelling 1 0-0 2, Austin Holzer 0 0-0 0, Derek Jacobus 0 0-0 0, John Bardsley 3 0-0 8, Brandon Buck 0 0-0 0, Pat Martin 2 2-2 6, Ben Struss 2 6-6 10, Taylor Oltmann 1 0-0 2, Draven Fuller 0 0-0 0, Drew Heitland 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 11-14 42.

LINN-MAR (57): Matt Lassen 3 6-6 12, Jordan Bohannon 2 0-0 4, Jon Schlotterback 3 1-2 7, Jimmy Roth 4 1-5 9, Derik Gogg 1 0-0 2, Nic Uhlir 5 2-3 16, Lane Halupnik 0 0-0 0, Matt Meier 3 0-0 7. Totals 21 10-16 57.

Halftime – Linn-Mar 27, Kennedy 14. 3-point goals – Kennedy 3 (Bardsley 2, Carter), Linn-Mar 5 (Uhlir 4, Meier). Total fouls – Kennedy 16, Linn-mar 15. Fouled out – none.