

Uhlir leads Lions past Cougars, 73-65

Written by Mike Condon

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Close games are nothing new for Linn-Mar.

The Lions have had their share of contests this season decided in the final minutes. Lately those swing games have gone against the Lions.

Junior guard Nic Uhlir would have none of that in Friday night's showdown against Mississippi Valley Conference rival Cedar Rapids Kennedy.

The 6-foot sharpshooter was fouled as he nailed the last of his four 3-point baskets with just over a minute to play. He converted the foul shot to give the Lions a six-point lead and they went on to a hard-fought 73-65 road win over the Cougars.

It was Uhlir's second big game against the Cougars in 10 days. He scored 30 points in the Lions' 70-64 win Feb. 4 at Linn-Mar and led the Lions in Friday's win with 25.

Uhlir credited teammate Jordan Bohannon for setting him up on the game-changing play.

"Jordan drove and just made a great pass out and I just wanted to make it and did," he said. "We were able to make plays down the stretch. We hit a couple of 3s and Jordan hit a bunch of free throws at the end and we were able to get the win."

Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson said late-game situations have been a focal point in practice for his team.

"The one thing we have been working on in practice is that late-game stuff," he said. "We've had several (games) where we've had the ball late with small leads and a couple times we've let them get away from us."

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"I told the guys in the locker room tonight that I thought we really executed in the last three minutes," Robertson continued. "We got the ball in the right people's hands and we hit our free throws."

As the scores of both games would indicate, the two teams were evenly matched. The difference in the game ended up being the play of Linn-Mar's bench. The Lions (11-8, 9-5) got 20 points and some solid defense from the five reserves that saw action. Kennedy (14-5, 10-4) got 14 points from its bench.

"It's a strength of our team," Robertson said of his deep bench. "We play 9 or 10 guys. On any given night, it can be a different guy who steps up."

That "guy" in this game was junior Trevor Noble. The 6-4 forward scored eight points, pulled down several key rebounds and was a valuable outlet to help the Lions' guards handle Kennedy's pressure defense.

Noble played two long stints in each half. Both times he was in the game, the Lions grabbed the lead.

"They pressured our ball-handlers quite a bit so I was just trying to find the openings behind their defense," Noble said. "We have a lot of big guys who can produce so whoever is having a good game will get the time."

Robertson was quick to point out Noble's contribution.

"Tonight (Noble) had a big game off the bench," he said. "He gave us eight points and we needed it all."

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The Lions led 34-30 at halftime but Kennedy came out and grabbed the lead as center Drew Heitland scored all seven of his points coming out of the break. From that point on the margin was never above five either way until Uhlir's four-point play.

The Cougars had some chances down the stretch to cut the deficit, but couldn't get closer than four as Bohannon made four foul shots in the final 30 seconds to seal the game. He finished with 19 points.

A.J. Carter led Kennedy with 19 points Cole Murdock added 12.

"Kennedy's very good," Robertson said. "Coming over here, we knew it was going to be a battle. We played really well at our place against them so we knew they would be ready to go tonight.

"It was a good high school basketball game," he continued. "There weren't a whole lot of big leads. There was a lot of back and forth and we were fortunate to come away with the win."

LINN-MAR (73): Nic Uhlir 8 5-5 25, Riley Murphy 1 0-0 3, Trevor Noble 3 2-2 8, Griffin Brennecke 0 0-0 0, Jordan Bohannon 5 6-6 19, Ben Larson 1 0-0 2, Jon Schlotterback 3 0-0 6, Lane Halupnik 0 1-2-1, Ryan Schmidt 1 2-2 4, Jordan Brandt 2 1-3 5. Totals 24 17-20 73.

KENNEDY (65): Zach Daniels 2 0-0 6, A.J.Carter 8 3-3 19, Derek Jacobus 1 2-4 5, John Bardsley 2 2-2 6, Cole Murdock 4 2-2 14, Bryton Heisler 3 0-0 6, Austin Holzer 1 0-0 2, Jal Bil 0 0-0 0, Brandon Buck 0 0-0 0, Drew Heitland 2 3-5 7. Totals 23 13-16 65.

Linn-Mar 15 19 18 21 – 73
Kennedy 11 19 19 16 – 65

3-point goals – Linn-Mar 8 (Uhlir 4, Bohannon 3, Murphy), Kennedy 6 (Murdock 4, Daniels 2).
Turnovers: Linn-Mar 11, Kennedy 15. Total fouls: Linn-Mar 19, Kennedy 18. Fouled out -

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None.