

Lions proving selves in tough conditions

Written by Mike Condon

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They have played just four games, been hindered by an inconsistent practice schedule and have a roster littered with sophomores and freshmen.

Yes, the Linn-Mar girls soccer team is still working to find its way. Tuesday night's 2-0 win over Cedar Rapids Prairie on a raw, windy night at John Wall Field showed the good and bad for the 4-0 Lions.

The good has been a defense that has not been scored on in 346 minutes of play. The not so good has been the inconsistency that comes with youth combined with tough playing conditions.

"This was a good win for us under tough conditions against a very good Prairie team," said Linn-Mar Coach Steve Dickinson. "Our defense has been pretty solid. They work well together as a group."

That defense was tested often during the first half against Prairie. The Lions were working against a stiff wind in the first 40 minutes and Prairie (3-6) stepped up the pressure.

"It was difficult for us to work against that kind of a wind," Dickinson said. "I thought we did what we had to do. Prairie did a great job moving the ball and keeping the pressure on us."

Junior Madison Scheldrup is the veteran of the Lion defense. She said the teamwork among the defensive back four is the key.

"It all starts with our great goalie (sophomore Rylie Frese) and we all know what we are supposed to be doing," she said. "We get great support from our midfielders and forwards and the seniors who come in off the bench give us great leadership."

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The defensive effort paid dividends late in the first half. A ball was chipped up the field towards Prairie freshman keeper Kendra Gaskill. She came out of her box in an effort to clear the ball. Lion sophomore Olivia Garcia beat Gaskill to the loose ball, made a move around a pair of Prairie defenders and knocked the ball into an open net with 1:47 left in the half.

"That was a huge goal for us to get," Dickinson said. "It was a great play by Olivia to get to the ball and put it in."

Linn-Mar picked up the pace in the second half with the wind at its back. Senior Emily Soyer scored with 25:07 remaining off a feed from freshman Amanda Heiderscheit. Prairie was able to mount a couple of rushes the rest of the way, but couldn't get the ball past Frese.

"You have to be tough to play in these conditions," Scheldrup said. "I think these early games have made us tougher and it will pay off for us later in the season."

Dickinson said it has been tough to get a read on his team.

"We haven't had a regular practice schedule because of the weather," he said. "You could see it tonight. We played a lot of different people in different places. We are working to get people in the right places. We have five freshmen we are trying to work in and we have six sophomores. We are young so there will be some growing pains."

Scheldrup is confident the Lions will continue to show improvement.

"We have only played four games," she said. "We have a lot of tough games to play but I think the team is coming together and we should keep getting better."