

Noble, Brandt spur Lions to substate finals

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Not always, but sometimes, practice does make perfect.

Linn-Mar junior Trevor Noble and sophomore Jordan Brandt have been subs all year, coming off the bench to relieve the starters.

But both were in the game Friday night when Dubuque Hempstead was making a late surge in the Class 4A substate semifinal in the Lions' gym.

And given the chance to make a difference, they delivered when it counted.

Within a three-minute span in the fourth quarter, Noble and Brandt were an unstoppable duo and gave their team the boost needed to pull out a 62-52 win.

"The two of us play a lot together on the practice squad," said Noble. "We get a lot of action against the starters. So we're always ready to go when we get an opportunity to go in there."

What looked like a cakewalk for the Lions (13-9) into a match-up next week with top ranked Dubuque Senior suddenly turned tense in the second half against Hempstead (9-14).

The Mustangs galloped back from a 30-18 halftime deficit to a five-point spread with six minutes left in the contest.

But Brandt, the son of Linn-Mar girls coach Michael Brandt, came to rescue with a clutch 3-pointer. He then stole the ball and dished to Noble for an easy bucket.

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After Noble scored again on an uncontested layup, Brandt pulled off another heist under the basket and handed off to Noble for one more bunny.

With three minutes to go, the Lions were back up by 11 and coasted the rest of the way on free throws by leading scorers Nic Uhlir and Jordan Bohannon.

“Those plays were huge,” Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson said of his subs' crunch-time heroics. “Jordan just has a knack for being around the ball, and Trevor seems always to be able to sneak in there under the basket. They were big down the stretch.

“Obviously, we rely on Uhlir and Bohannon a lot. But the nice thing about this team is that they're very unselfish. Different guys always step up.”

Brandt said teaming up Noble was nothing new.

“Trevor's really good at cutting to the basket,” he explained. “So when I got a couple of steals tonight, I looked for him. We do that all the time in practice.”

And while thrilled to be a game-changer, Noble downplayed their turn in the spotlight.

“We're just in there to play our role,” he said. “We try to do whatever we can to help our team. I'm glad our teammates have confidence in us.”

As usual, Bohannon and Uhlir led Linn-Mar's scoring attack, with 15 and 14 points, respectively, many of them on late-game free throws.

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Next up for a chance to make it to the state tournament is a date with Dubuque Senior (21-1) Tuesday at Hempstead.

The Lions lost their first meeting 66-41 back in December, and Senior's only loss of the season was to a suburban Chicago team in a mid-season tournament.

"It'll be an opportunity for us," said Robertson. "And a challenge."

HEMPSTEAD (52): Martell Wilson 7 3-4 18, Bailry Paulsen 1 0-0 2, Robert Duax 5 2-2 12, Avery Butler 4 1-2 13, Ty Putchio 2 1-2 5, Will Smith 1 0-0 2,. Totals 20 7-10 52.

LINN-MAR (62): Nic Uhler 3 8-10 14, Jordan Bohannon 3 8-8 15, Ben Larson 1 2-3 4, Jon Schlotterback 3 0-1 6, Luke Halupnik 3 0-0 7, Riley Murphy 1 0-0 3, Trevor Noble 4 0-0 8, Ryan Schmidt 0 0-0 0, Jordan Brandt 2 0-1 5. Totals 20 18-23 62.

Halftime – Linn-Mar 30, Hempstead 18. 3-point goals – Hempstead 5 (Butler 4, Wilson 1), Linn-Mar 4 (Murphy 1, Brandt 1, Bohannon 1, Halupnik 1). Total fouls – Hempstead 18, Linn-Mar 12. Fouled out – None.