

No. 12 Lions nipped by No. 15 PV

Written by Tom Fruehling

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It was a classic battle between blue bloods and blue collar.

And in the end Tuesday night the gritty girls from Pleasant Valley beat the more-heralded Linn-Mar Lions. But just barely.

While spotting the smaller, younger Spartans a 12-point lead after three quarters, the Lions roared back to tie it at 54-all with less than a minute to go.

Following a wide-open driving bucket on the other end by PV's Lana Lindstrom, Linn-Mar's two stars in the waning seconds both had their chances to knot it again. But Kamryn Finley's jumper was a little off and Amanda Ollinger's rebound rolled off the rim.

With that, the Mississippi Athletic Conference contenders (now 10-4) head back to Bettendorf with a squeaker 56-54 win.

"Our theme this year is that we're a blue collar team," said Pleasant Valley coach Jennifer Goetz, whose club is ranked 15th in Class 5A. "My kids play really hard. We have to in order to beat good teams like Linn-Mar."

For the 12th-ranked Lions, touted by Coach Jaime Brandt as having among the top talent in the

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state, it was a case of too little too late.

"I think we started off too methodical and too lackadaisical," said Ollinger, an all-state senior. "We had a lot of turnovers.

"But we really amped up our defense the fourth quarter. We rebounded and passed the ball well. But it wasn't quite enough."

As usual, Ollinger and Finley provided much of the offensive firepower for Linn-Mar (9-4), accounting for 26 of the team's 34 points over the first three periods. For the night, sophomore sharpshooter Finley scored 20 on 8-for-12 shooting with the Lions' only three 3-pointers.



A formidable force on both ends as always, Ollinger had 17 points and 12 rebounds to go with five steals and four assists.

"She's a great player," Goetz said of the Iowa signee. "But we tried not to focus too much on her. We just wanted to outwork her and make things difficult for her.

"We tried to focus on what makes us successful. And I thought we did that for three quarters.

"I think a little panic set in the fourth quarter. But that's not unusual for high school girls. We did

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just enough to win – barely.”

Displaying a lot of ball movement, Pleasant Valley offered a more balanced attack and was led in scoring by sophomores Kira Althofer and Ellie Spelhaug with 15 apiece.

Linn-Mar's dynamic duo got some help late. As they mounted their fourth-quarter comeback, it was junior center Lexi Frese who sparked the rally. She hit a layup right off and then a long 2-pointer with one minute left to cut the Spartans' dwindling lead to 54-49.

Finley put more pressure on with a clutch trey, and then Frese stole the ball on an inbound pass with 40 seconds to go. She was fouled on her layup try but calmly sank two free throws to tie the score at 54-apiece.

Lindstrom missed a jumper on the other end but followed-up with a game-winning layup down the lane.

“We’ve had some tough losses to good teams this year,” Goetz said. “This is the first time we’ve come out with a win in a one-possession game.”

Ollinger said the loss was no fluke for her 12th-rank squad that was coming off an impressive three-game win streak.

“They’re a good team, and they deserved to win,” she said. “They played harder and, I think, with more heart.”

“We never gave up, and we kept fighting. We just have to keep pushing and play with more consistency.”

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PLEASANT VALLEY (56): C.Donahue 3 1-1 7, Arthofer 4 4-4 15, Lindstrom 3 0-2 6, DeGeorge 0 2-2 2, E.Spelhaug 5 5-6 15, C.Spelhaug 2 0-0 5, Donahue 2 0-2 5, Paul 0 1-2 1, Budde 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 13-19 56.

LINN-MAR (54): Akers 2 0-0 4, Frese 3 4-4 10, Lancial 0 0-0 0, Finley 8 1-2 20, Ollinger 6 5-8 17, Johnson 1 1-1 3, Murphy 0 0-0 0, Spies 0 0-0 0, Larson 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 11-15 54.

Halftime – Pleasant Valley 28, Linn-Mar 20. 3-point goals – Pleasant Valley 5 (Althofer 3, E.Spelhaug 1, Donahue 1), Linn-Mar 3 (Finley 3).