

Brandt taking Lions back to state

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jaime Printy Brandt is heading back to the girls state basketball tournament with the Linn-Mar Lions next week, only this time she's going as their young head coach instead of their star player.

It feels just as sweet.

The sixth-ranked Lions defeated Dowling Catholic, 61-49, in the Class 5A regional finals Tuesday night behind a pair of sensational performances by Megan Murphy and Kamryn Finley.

Brandt played in three state tournaments with Linn-Mar in 2006, 2008 and 2009. She made her first trip as a 15-year-old freshman and now she'll make this trip as a 25-year-old head coach.

Linn-Mar (19-4) will face Indianola (22-1) in the opening round of the state tournament at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 2 at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

"It's exciting," Brandt said after hugging her players, her husband and just about everyone else in sight. "I think I was definitely a lot more nervous for tonight's game than as a player. I get a lot more nervous as a coach."

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"It will be just as fun," she said about making another trip to Wells Fargo Arena. "I'm excited to make new memories with this group and get down there and see what we can do."

"I was telling our coaching staff that Des Moines is some of the best memories I have from high school. This is a special group, they get along so well. To be able to go down there and compete in the state tournament is going to be so rewarding."

Murphy and Finley, who are both sophomores, played the best all-around games of their careers at exactly the right time.

Murphy came off the bench and popped in seven 3-pointers for 21 points. Finley finished with the first double-double of her career with 19 points and a season-best 10 rebounds.

Murphy is a good 3-point shooter, but she hadn't hit more than four triples in a game this season. She came out firing against Dowling and finished 7-of-15 from long range, including a flurry of three 3-pointers in the first quarter to point the Lions in the right direction.

Murphy's confidence soared after she hit those first three triples.

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