

Late run lifts Lions

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kiah vs. Tia Show fizzled Thursday night.

Kiah Stokes, Linn-Mar's star player, missed four crucial free throws in the final 15 seconds. Tia Dawson, Washington's top player, fouled out and scored only four points.

It was not an instant classic, but Linn-Mar found a way to win a ballgame. As usual.

The third-ranked Lions scored the last six points of the game on free throws and escaped No. 5 Washington, 44-41, in a Mississippi Valley Conference defensive battle at Washington.

Stokes finished with 18 points, 18 rebounds and three blocked shots, so it's not like the prep All-American had a terrible game, but she missed eight free throws and shot 4-for-11 from the field, well below her normal field-goal rate of 71.4 percent.

"Thankfully we won with all my missed free throws," said Stokes, who was 10 for 18 at the foul line.

Washington led, 41-38, with 1:39 left and appeared poised to collect a rare victory against Linn-Mar, but the Warriors failed to score again and let it slip away.

"It was a hard loss," said Alissa Oney, who led the Warriors with 10 points. "Everyone is taking it hard."

Jazz Royster, a strong 5-foot-10 junior, had a strong defensive game against Stokes, using her body to keep the 6-foot-3 senior away from the basket. Dawson, 6-foot-2, provided extra coverage as needed, when she was available.

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"They're a physical team," Stokes said. "I tried to get a little movement on offense, but it's difficult when you have a couple of people guarding you."

Ashley Piper gave the Warriors (10-2, 7-2) their 41-38 lead with a free throw. Jenna Eells missed two free throws for Linn-Mar, but Stokes grabbed an offensive rebound, got fouled and made two free throws with 1:15 remaining to make it 41-40.

Washington committed a costly turnover and Kailee Karr hit one foul shot for Linn-Mar with 59.4 seconds left, tying the game at 41-41. Karr missed her second free throw, but the Warriors knocked the ball out of bounds and fouled Eells with 31.3 seconds left. Eells made one foul shot, giving the Lions a 42-41 edge.

Jordon Pilcher saw her 3-point shot go in-and-out for the Warriors, who fouled Stokes trying for the rebound with 15.2 seconds to go. Stokes missed both free throws, but Linn-Mar retained possession when a scramble for the rebound ended in a jump ball.

Stokes got fouled again with 11.1 seconds left, and missed two more free throws, leaving the score 42-41. Jazz Royster missed a 3-pointer for Washington and Linn-Mar got the ball out-of-bounds with nine-tenths of a second to go.

The Warriors fouled Stokes before the clocked started, and this time she nailed both free throws for the 44-41 final margin.

Linn-Mar (13-1, 9-1) was delighted to escape with the ragged victory. "On the road, in the Valley, an ugly win, we'll take it," Coach Mike Brandt remarked.

"It's always fun to play in close games like this," Stokes said, "and it's better to come out with a win."

Dawson collected her third foul with 2:08 left in the first half, got her fourth with 1:45 left in the

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third quarter and fouled out with 1:50 left in the game. She finished with eight rebounds, six blocked shots and four points.

Washington scored just four points in the first quarter and trailed 20-8 midway through the second stanza, but Washington's reserves played well and pulled the Warriors within 23-20 at halftime.

Washington grabbed a 35-31 lead early in the fourth quarter on a basket by Abby Herb, but the Warriors could not hold on.

"Turnovers," Washington Coach Frank Howell noted. "We had ball security issues. If we could have corrected that ..."

Linn-Mar, the defending Class 4A state champion, capitalized enough times to stay in first place in the Mississippi Division of the MVC. "I was very happy with the composure that we kept throughout the whole game," Brandt said.

Washington got a big boost from its reserves and outscored Linn-Mar in bench points, 18-3. Tasha Roundtree scored seven points, Madison Kramer five, Herb four and Janay Pritchett scored two as the subs almost saved the day for the Warriors.

"I thought they came in and picked up the tempo a little bit and knocked down some shots and got the crowd back into it," Howell said.

Rachel Thrune sparked Linn-Mar early and finished with nine points. She began the game with a 3.8 scoring average.

LINN-MAR (44): Brandt 0 0-0 0, Thrune 4 1-2 9, Karr 3 1-2 7, Eells 2 1-2 7, Stokes 4 10-18 18, Cheatham 1 1-1 3, Martins 0 0-0 0, Major 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 14-25 44.

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WASHINGTON (41): Piper 1 1-2 4, Oney 5 0-0 10, Pilcher 1 0-0 2, Royster 1 0-0 3, Dawson 2 0-0 4, Pritchett 1 0-0 2, Beard 0 0-0 0, Kramer 2 0-0 5, Roundtree 3 0-0 7, Klaus 0 0-0 0, Herb 2 0-0 4, Carr 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 1-2 41.

Halftime -- Linn-Mar 23, Washington 20. 3-point goals -- Linn-Mar 2 (Eells 2), Washington 4 (Piper, Royster, Kramer, Roundtree). Fouled out -- Dawson.