

Indians brace for No. 1 Waverly-Shell Rock

Written by Jim Ecker

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Marion thought it would have a good basketball team this season with Kasey Semler and Dusty Albaugh, but the Indians finished January with a wobbly 9-7 record and their hopes appeared to fade.

They haven't lost since.

The Indians (17-7) will be riding an eight-game winning streak when they face No.1 Waverly-Shell Rock (24-0) in the first round of the Class 3A state tournament Tuesday at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

Tipoff is scheduled for 3:30 p.m.

Marion posted a 4-5 record in January, hardly the mark of champions, but Coach Mike Manderscheid told his guys to wipe January from their minds and get ready for February.



"It was a new month," he said. "We knew going into the season, when you play seven of nine games on the road in January, it's tough. Even if you're in the Wamac (Conference), it's still tough to go in there and beat teams on the road.

"We got out of January and we said, 'Hey, it's a new month, a new beginning, let's just start over and work hard and see what we can do and make a little bit of a run here.' "

Waverly-Shell Rock began its "run" in November and never stopped. Waverly-Shell Rock has won 24 straight games by an average margin of 23.6 points, and the Class 3A club has pocketed wins over such Class 4A teams as Cedar Falls, Waterloo West, Waterloo East and

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Xavier along the way.

Marion is seeded No.8 for the eight-team tournament and Waverly-Shell Rock is seeded No.1. The Indians know they are big underdogs, but that hasn't dimmed their enthusiasm for making their second trip to the state tournament in three years.

"I'm so excited," said Marion forward Dan Van Gorp. "As a senior, it's something I've looked forward to. I knew we could make it, I knew we had the team for it. We just pulled through."

Semler leads the Indians at 21.5 points and Albaugh is averaging 12.5, but Albaugh has been Marion's leading scorer in three postseason games at 15.7 points compared to 14.0 for Semler. Albaugh has been hot from behind the 3-point arc, hitting 11 of 22 in tight postseason victories over Center Point-Urbana, Mount Vernon and Benton Community.

Van Gorp is the third-leading scorer at 7.0 ppg, followed by Dylan Cronk (6.1), Tyler Fisher (4.6) and Austin Hardman (3.3). Mitch Wagner, a transfer from Kennedy who became eligible after the first semester, has given the Indians more depth in the backcourt.

Semler, Albaugh and Fisher played for the varsity as sophomores in 2009, when the Indians lost to Carroll by one point in the opening round of the Class 3A state tournament. They know the sights and sounds of Wells Fargo Arena.

"You know what to expect when you go down there," said Manderscheid. "I don't think that will kill the jitters ... Every kid will have jitters no matter how many times they've been down there."

"But they know what it's like to go down there. They know what it's like to go down there and lose in the first round, too. We're obviously not going to go down there with the intention of just rolling over and saying we're the eighth seed. They're going to go down there and give it our best shot."

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Waverly-Shell Rock has good size and good depth. Three of its players stand 6-foot-5 and three others are 6-foot-4. They don't have a big scorer, but they have eight guys who average 4.7 to 11.3 points per game, so the points can come from anywhere. Connor Coleman, a 6-foot-2 junior, is the leading scorer.

The other first-round games in the Class 3A state tournament match Dallas Center-Grimes (22-2) against Norwalk (21-3), Sioux City Heelan (22-2) against Dubuque Wahlert (18-6), and Mount Pleasant (22-2) against MOC-Floyd Valley (21-3).

The semifinals are scheduled for Thursday night and the finals are Saturday night. If Marion wins Tuesday, it will face Dallas Center-Grimes or Norwalk in the semifinals Thursday at 6:35 p.m.