

Linn-Mar denied in regional final

Written by Mike Condon

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In the end, Iowa City West was a little more "in sync" than Linn-Mar.

Lions volleyball coach Teresa Kehe's description told the story of Tuesday night's Class 5A regional final at a loud Linn-Mar gym.

The No. 11 Women of Troy (27-11) avenged a pair of regular-season losses to the No. 10 Lions, earning a trip to the U.S. Cellular Center for the state tournament with a 25-23, 29-27, 26-24 victory.

"We really struggled tonight," Kehe said. "Again, our youth caught up with us. We just weren't in sync all night long and they were."

West coach Randy Dolson said the difference between the two teams was razor-thin all year.

"I thought we were evenly matched every time we played them," he said. "Earlier in the year, we had them a couple times. They are a great team, but I always felt like we hurt ourselves and they ended up winning."

Neither team led by more than three points in the opening set. A kill from Ariana Rolle pushed Linn-Mar into a 23-23 tie. However a net serve followed by a block from Ali Tauchen gave West the set.

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The Lions struggled with their passing in the second set and found themselves down 24-14, only to come roaring back to score 11 straight points to take a 25-24 lead.

"We thought we were playing a little bit tight," Dolson said of his team's play during Linn-Mar's comeback. "They got caught up in the moment. We were a little hesitant and that caused some hitting errors."

Kehe thought things could have been different if the Lions had been able to complete the rally.



"If we could have pulled that off, it might have made a big difference," she said. "We just didn't handle ourselves very well at times and lacked some composure, but (West) is a very good team and they came to play."

Linn-Mar had three chances to serve for the set, but couldn't get the decisive point.

A kill from Colby Greene, followed by a pair of hitting errors by Linn-Mar, gave West a 2-0 lead.

The Lions' lone senior regular, University of Iowa basketball recruit Amanda Ollinger, agreed with her coach that winning the second set could have changed the course of the match.

"I really think it would have made a difference," she said. "It says so much about this team that we were down by 10 points and we kept battling. It takes time to learn how to handle those situations and we

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weren't quite able to do it."

West jumped out again in the third set, grabbing an 8-3 advantage. The Lions fought back and eventually held a 23-19 lead.

At that point, West turned to sophomore Chandler Haight, who had five kills to bring the Women of Troy to match point where they finished it on an off-speed shot from Tauchen.

Linn-Mar finished at 28-9. The Lions last went to state in 2010 and there were high hopes entering Tuesday's match. With only Ollinger missing next season from the regular rotation, Kehe is hopeful the team can take that next step.

"We've got some high expectations for them in the future," she said. "Hopefully we can keep building and take it further next season."

Ollinger believes that will happen in 2016.

"There is so much talent here," she said. "Anything I can do to help this program get further next year, I am going to do it. This group has been a family and I want to see them get to state next year."