

Lions embrace new role as underdogs

Written by Jim Ecker

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Times have changed for the Linn-Mar boys basketball team.

They won't come into the new season with glossy rankings or high expectations in the general public, at least not in comparison to their glory days, but that doesn't seem to faze this group of Lions at all.

"I think we'll do really well," senior Ben Larson said Saturday after Linn-Mar beat Marion, 67-39, in the Metro Sports Report.com Classic at Johnson Hall. "A lot of people think we're going to be the underdogs this season."

"Underdogs" is a new role for Linn-Mar, which has won three Class 4A state titles in the past 10 years and finished second on two other trips to Des Moines.

"It's been awhile," said Coach Chris Robertson. "I think last year we learned, it doesn't matter what our record is, everybody still wants to beat us. And I think this group understands that."

The Lions won state titles in 2004, 2007 and 2011. They placed second in 2005 and 2009, but they slipped to 13-10 last year and did not make it to Des Moines.

They still have an extremely solid program, however, and the Lions displayed their depth Saturday by scoring 67 points against their Marion neighbors despite not placing anyone in

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double figures.

Lane Halupnik, looking to carry a heavier load for Linn-Mar, led the balanced attack with nine points. Nic Uhler had eight points. Trevor Noble, Jordan Bohannon, Larson and Jordan Brandt collected seven points apiece as 12 players scored.

"We're deep," said Robertson. "We can play 12 guys, which is kind of rare.

"I think this team has such good chemistry that they're all just cheering for each other. Hopefully that will be a positive and not a negative as we get going."

Craig Engle led Marion with 11 points. Daly Quinn scored nine points.

The Indians, who have a pesky Class 3A club, like to have an annual scrimmage against their bigger cross-town opponents. This time it came in a Hall of Pride Challenge event at Kirkwood.

"They expose a lot of our weaknesses. I want that," said Marion Coach Mike Manderscheid. "I want to know: Where do we need to work?"

"It's nice to see 4A strength," he said. "The difference between them and us is physical. They're just a little stronger and athletic than what we were at times."

MARION (39): Schneiders 1 2-2 4, Cannoy 3 0-0 6, Daly Quinn 4 1-2 9, Engle 3 5-8 11, Gaede 0 0-0 0, Manderscheid 0 0-0 0, Hardman 1 1-4 3, Smith 1 0-1 2, Williams 1 1-2 4, DeShaun Quinn 0 0-0 0, Byers 0 0-0 0, Devin Quinn 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 10-19 39.

LINN-MAR (67): Uhler 2 3-5 8, Murphy 1 0-0 3, Noble 2 3-5 7, Brennecke 2 2-4 6, Bohannon 2 2-2 7, Larson 3 0-0 7, Schlotterback 2 0-1 4, Halupnik 4 1-1 9, Eby 2 0-0 5, Schmidt 0 0-0 0,

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Brandt 3 0-0 7, Evans 0 1-2 1, Tichy 0 0-0 0, Willenborg 1 0-0 3, Hand 0 0-0 0. Totals 24 12-20 67.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 30, Marion 12. 3-point goals - Marion 1 (Williams 1), Linn-Mar 6 (Uhlir, Murphy, Larson, Eby, Brandt, Willenborg).