

Ollinger helps Lions escape Indians

Written by Tom Fruehling

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For a while Saturday night, it looked like the age-old (but sometimes interrupted) rivalry between the Linn-Mar and Marion girls was going to be more of the same.

The traditionally dominant Lions charged out to a 19-8 lead on the big stage at the U.S. Cellular Center while the freshman-laden Indians appeared to have a case of the jitters.

Marion senior workhorse Amanda Sahm took charge, however, and even coaxed her young teammates into the lead before finally falling 52-48.

As was bound to happen sooner or later, new Linn-Mar star Amanda Ollinger (with help from her former AAU pal Niki Sharma) celebrated a second half coming-out party that proved too tough for the undersized Marion girls to handle.

In her third game since transferring from Jefferson at mid-season, the 6-foot-1 all-stater pumped in 15 of her game-high 17 points after

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halftime. She also collected a team-high nine rebounds along with three crucial steals and two blocks.

“She was the difference,” acknowledged Marion Coach Corby Laube. “At the end of the game, they were going into her in the post. We tried to battle her.”

But they couldn’t stop her.

“She is a foot taller than everybody else,” said Sharma with some exaggeration in explaining why she kept feeding Ollinger the ball in the second half. “That’s my strength, driving and kicking off for other people to shoot.”

While the Indians had no answer in the end, they displayed a lot of grit in making a game of it after a poor start.

“We have three freshmen,” said the gutsy 5-foot-7 Sahm, who led her team with 16 points (including all 10 of her free throw attempts) and also pulled down 10 rebounds. “And the atmosphere here is a lot different. Linn-Mar’s a really good team. But we expected to beat them.”

Even though Marion (now 9-3) is a level below the Class 5A fifth-ranked Lions (9-1), Coach Laube was looking for a victory as well.

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“I think the girls were maybe a little too hyped or excited at the start,” he said. “But our defense started to lock in a lot better. That gave us confidence, and our shots started to fall.”

When his own freshman daughter, Mia, knocked in a 3-pointer midway through the second quarter, it seemed to give Marion new life. Soon after that, Sahm scored on a nice pass from ninth grader Chloe Rice and the Indians were right back in it.

They tied it up at 21-all and trailed by only one at halftime. They then took a 31-28 lead on senior Michalyn Mohr’s 3-pointer, before the Ollinger express took over.



“I felt really good out there tonight,” the junior skyscraper said. “Everyone is sharing the ball, and we’re having a lot of fun.”

Lion Coach Jaime (Printy) Brandt, meanwhile, was just relieved to pull out a hard-fought win. “Marion has a good young club,” said the first-year coach. “They played

hard and battled all the way through.

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“We didn’t shoot well. But we were able to do whatever it took to win.

The battle between the two Marion teams was part of the Rivalry Saturday event at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Caitlyn Smith scored 13 points for Marion. Olivia Montague scored 11 for Linn-Mar.

MARION (48) – Chloe Rice 1 2-2 5, Caitlyn Smith 3 4-4 13, Amanda Sahm 3 10-10 16, Michalyn Mohr 1 3-6 6, Mia Laube 2 1-4 7, Jozee Payton 0 1-2 1, Isabella Sade 0 0-0 0. Totals 10 21-28 48.

LINN-MAR (52) – Lexi Frese 3 2-4 8, Brittney Lancial 0 1-2 1, Olivia Montague 4 3-3 11, Nikita Sharma 3 0-1 6, Kamryn Finley 3 1-2 7, Megan Murphy 0 0-0 0, Claire Larson 0 0-1 0, Amanda Ollinger 6 5-5 17, Lannie Nietert 1 0-0 2, Natalie Ross 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 12-18 52.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 24, Marion 23. 3-point goals – Marion 7 (Smith 3, Laube 2, Rice 1, Mohr 1), Linn-Mar - none. Total fouls – Marion 16, Linn-Mar 19. Fouled out – Sahm.