

Washington girls hold off Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Frank Howell has coached richly talented basketball teams at Cedar Rapids Washington that have played for state titles and he's coached other teams that have had to scratch and fight for every victory they get.

This is one of those years where Howell is trying to coax as much out of his club as possible and the Warriors succeeded Friday night with a 53-44 victory over the Prairie Hawks at Prairie.

Washington nudged about the .500 mark with a 7-6 record. Meanwhile, the Hawks continued to keep plugging away with a 1-11 record that has saddled the program with 23 losses in its last 24 games dating to last season.

Howell has been the same guy through the years, exhorting his team to keep playing hard and keep improving.

"Nothing changes," he remarked. "We win a game, we come back the next day, we focus on

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trying to get better. We lose a game, we come back, we try to focus on getting better. That's always been my approach."

Howell said he enjoys the challenge.

"That's what it's all about," he said. "I think we still have an up-side. I think we'll continue to get better."

And Howell will continue to bring an enthusiastic approach to the game.

"I just remember Jim Valvano's line," he said, referring to the former North Carolina State coach. "He said nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm. So I just try to bring as much enthusiasm as I can."

Prairie battled into the lead in the second half with new coach Josh Bentley pushing the right buttons, but Washington battled back and was the stronger team in the last four minutes of the game.

Jayla Pledge-Johnson gave the Warriors a 43-35 lead with a breakaway layup and Payton Bruner made it 45-35 with a bucket. Prairie pulled within 46-40 on a field goal by Emilie Rotter and two free throws by Halle Person with 2:02 remaining.

Kandis O'Donnell gave Washington a 48-40 advantage with two free throws, but Rotter pulled the Hawks within 48-43 with a three-point play with 1:21 left.

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Olivia Usher pulled Prairie within 49-44 with a free throw with 44.3 seconds to go, but Joniqua Clark made four free throws for Washington to finish the 53-44 verdict.

Usher led all scorers with 20 points. Rotter scored 11 for Prairie.

O'Donnell paced Washington with 15 points. Clark scored 11.

WASHINGTON (53): Clark 2 7-11 11, Visser 2 1-2 6, Corey 0 1-2 1, Hoeger 1 0-0 3, Squires 2 1-2 5, Bruner 1 2-2 4, Puk 0 3-9 3, O'Donnell 6 2-2 15, Oler 1 1-2 3, Pledge-Johnson 1 0-0 2. Totals 16 18-32 53.

PRAIRIE (44): Moenk 0 1-2 1, Altenhofen 1 2-2 4, Rotter 4 3-5 11, Adams 0 0-2 0, Usher 6 5-8 20, Wagemester 1 0-0 2, Person 2 2-2 6. Totals 14 13-21 44.

Halftime - Washington 21, Prairie 20. 3-point goals - Washington 3 (Visser 1, Hoeger 1, O'Donnell 1), Prairie 3 (Usher 3).