

'Little' Warriors race past Rams

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Washington girls basketball team might have the shortest center and the shortest point guard in Class 5A this year, but these little Warriors are sure fun to watch.

Washington used its speed and athletic ability to bounce Dubuque Senior, 77-42, Thursday at the Washington gym for its third straight lopsided victory of the season.

The Warriors list starting center Anne Visser at 5-foot-8, but even that's a slight exaggeration.

"Well, 5-7 3/4," she confessed. "We rounded up."

Point guard Joniqua Clark is listed at 5-foot-1, but she's got the quickness and skills to play college ball next year.

Visser scored 18 points and Clark dished out eight assists for the Warriors, who used a zone press to torment the Rams and a deep bench to keep fresh players on the floor.

Payton Bruner and Jessi Puk both had 10 points and five steals for Washington and Puk

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collected five assists. The Warriors got 44 points from their starters and 33 from their reserves in the end-to-end victory.

"I figured we might be fun to watch this year, just because we've got a lot of kids that are small and fast," coach Frank Howell said.



The Warriors play hard, they share the ball and they cheer for each other.

"I enjoy this team," Howell said. "I enjoy coming into game night, I enjoy coming into practice even more.

"Every time I leave practice, I've left pretty happy most nights. And that's pretty rare for me in my 22nd year of being a head coach."

Visser popped in three 3-pointers, ran for the floor for layups and finished 7-of-11 overall with six rebounds. She might have a few problems guarding tall centers this season, but tall centers are going to have a lot of trouble guarding her.

"I think we played great," Visser said after the Warriors won their third straight game by more than 25 points. "I really enjoy this team this year.

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"Everybody is really pumped up for each other. It doesn't matter who scores. I just like how we play."

The Warriors might have the shortest center in the state, but that does not bother Howell in the slightest.

"The good thing is, she's a very skilled center," he said. "I'd rather have the shortest center in the state if it's the most skilled center in the state, as opposed to the biggest center in the state and the most unskilled center in the state."

All five Warriors can run, including their center.

"We don't have to wait for her," Howell said. "She'll get out and run."

Clark made several very sophisticated plays on offense Thursday night. On one play, she drove to the basket and froze a defender with a ball fake before scoring on a layup. On another play, she made a long bounce-pass to Puk for an easy layup on the run.

"I actually like passing more than watching me score," Clark said. "I'll score if I have to."

Clark is the catalyst for these run-and-stun Warriors.

"I absolutely love it. I love playing with her," Visser said. "I've played with her since 7th grade, I think. She sees the floor really well. She's fun to have on the team."

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Howell said Clark has a terrific work ethic and helps set the tone for the rest of the team.

"She's a lot of fun to watch," he said. "And you know what? She practices that way. She's all business."

The Warriors have whipped Davenport Central (78-49), Dubuque Wahlert (73-46) and Dubuque Senior (77-42). They know the schedule will get tougher, but they like their chances this year.

"People are doubting us, and we like it that way," Clark said. "We just have to keep proving ourselves."

"We don't have any tall people, so it's going to be hard work. Everyone is really fast. Everyone on our team is capable of scoring, so that's a problem for the other team."

"Our team is so quick, we can get deflections and we're pretty hard to get past."

Visser, Clark and Bruner are seniors on a mission in their final years at Washington.

"I think the possibilities are endless," Visser said. "I prefer being the underdog. I'm just excited to see what we can do."

Dubuque Senior fell to 0-3.

DUBUQUE SENIOR (42): Zillig 0 1-2 1, S.Biehl 0 0-0 0, Schueller 0 1-2 1, Kemp 0 0-0 0, Steuck 0 0-0 0, Burns 0 1-1 1, Hawkins 0 0-0 0 Evans 0 2-2 2, Wernimont 0 0-0 0 Mills 5 3-4 13, Udelhofen 0 2-5 2, Ferguson 0 0-0 0,

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Tigges 0 0-2 0, Mott 3 2-2 8, K.Biehl 4 1-3 11, Ruden 1 0-0 3, Jones 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 13-23 42.

WASHINGTON (77): Clark 2 0-0 4, Carey 1 2-2 5, Visser 7 1-2 18, V.Eniola 1 0-0 2, B.Hoeger 0 0-0 0, O'Donnell 3 0-1 6, M.Hoeger 0 0-1 0, Bruner 5 0-0 10, Puk 4 0-0 10, Riley 3 2-2 7, Mia 1 3-4 5, Johnson 4 0-2 8, D.Eniola 1 0-0 2, Levy 0 0-0 0. Totals 31 8-14 77.

Halftime - Washington 34, Dubuque Senior 18. 3-point goals - Dubuque Senior 3 (K.Biehl 2, Ruden 1), Washington 7 (Visser 3, Puk 2, Carey 1, Riley 1).