

## Lions spike J-Hawks in regional opener

Written by Jim Ecker

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Linn-Mar volleyball coach Rob Justis knows when to call an important timeout.

The Lions fell behind Jefferson, 16-8, in the first game of the Class 4A regional quarterfinals at Linn-Mar Monday night when Justis decided it was time for a chat.

Justis told his players to take a deep breath, relax and have fun. They were words of wisdom.

Linn-Mar rallied and defeated Jefferson, 21-25, 25-21, 25-22, 25-11 to advance to the regional semifinals.

The Lions (10-25) will play Dubuque Hempstead in the semifinals Thursday night at 7 at Linn-Mar.

Justis convinced his players to calm down.

"We've been to the state tournament the last two years, but there's really only two girls on this team that have been through that," he said.

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Megan Allmandinger and Meghan Holdgrafer are experienced veterans, but the Lions also have four inexperienced sophomores on the floor.

"They were a little too excited, maybe," he said. "Things were maybe going a little too fast for them. They just needed to slow down and relax and play volleyball."

Jefferson won only two matches all season, but the J-Hawks jumped to a 6-0 lead in the first game with Olivia Jaschen making good serves. Linn-Mar rallied from its 16-8 deficit and tied the game, 16-16, after Justis called a timeout, but Jefferson pulled away again for a 25-21 verdict.

Linn-Mar won tight contests in Games 2 and 3, then breezed to a 14-point victory in Game 4.

Allmandinger, Holdgrafer and Amber Gonsoski made a series of strong plays for Linn-Mar, with Gonsoski coming off the bench. Audra Schminke, Sydney Schmidt, Taylor Dalecky, Emma Weldon and Claire Tupper joined Allmandinger and Holdgrafer in the starting lineup (counting an initial substitution).



Jenna Sarantakos, Kayla Jaschen, Olivia Jaschen, Hannah McInerney, Kenna Fry, Kelli Walsh and Teshinna West were in the starting lineup for Jefferson (also counting an initial substitution). Devin Womochil and Megan Furnish helped as reserves.

Linn-Mar featured 6-foot-3 Kiah Stokes, an all-state volleyball player as well as a star basketball player, on the front line a year ago. Stokes is playing basketball at the University of Connecticut now, forcing Justis to change the offense this year.

"We ran a basic, pretty simple offense when Kiah was here: Set the ball high to Kiah and she

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would hit it," he said.

The Lions are rebuilding, but hope to give Hempstead a tough battle Thursday night.

"The difference between being an OK team and being a pretty good team is a pretty small difference," Justis said. "We've got girls who are capable of making all the plays that we need to make on the court. We just have to put them back to back to back on a more consistent basis."