

No. 9 Muscatine escapes Hawks' upset bid

Written by Tom Fruehling

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In a fast-paced and entertaining girls basketball season opener, highly regarded Muscatine barely eked out a 66-63 squeaker over newly-energized Prairie Saturday night on the Hawks' home court.

"It was a fun game to watch," said Prairie Coach Steve Doser. "We lost, but I'm really pleased with how the girls played.

"We start two sophomores, two juniors and one senior. And the first two girls off the bench are freshmen. So we're a very young team.

"But we've got great chemistry. And I know we'll keep improving."

Winners of just four games last year, the Hawks came close to pulling an upset right out of the gate against the Class 4A ninth-ranked Muskies from the Mississippi Athletic Conference.

Prairie dug itself out of an early hole and actually took a lead at 52-50 with five minutes to go.

The Hawks fell back again by six, but then made a late spurt to come within a point at 64-63 with 38 seconds to go.

Muscatine's cool 5-foot-4 sophomore playmaker Emily Clemens iced the game by dropping in two free throws.

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"We had a chance," said Doser.

For his spunky young girls, the narrow defeat was a confidence-builder.

"I think it showed we can play with anybody in the state this year," said junior Courteney McCrary, who led a balanced scoring effort with 17 points.

"We're playing with a lot more energy. And we were still in the game right to the end. We just kept fighting."

Katilyn Yanecek, the sole upperclassmen in the Hawk rotation, chipped in 14 points and promised an exciting season ahead.

"We came out ready to play. Our fans are going to be entertained this year."

Muscatine Coach Sue Orvis was just happy to come out with a win in her team's tip-off.

"I think both teams had some first-game jitters at the start. And we both play an up-tempo game, so you're going to have some mistakes.

"But once we settled in, it was a great game."

And she was fortunate to have three-year starter Leticia Lerma on fire for the night.

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Though listed at 5-10, the junior sharpshooter plays taller than that, especially against a short Prairie squad that starts no one over 5-8.

Lerma scored inside and out for 28 points, including a long 3-pointer and a conventional three-point play in the last three minutes to keep her team ahead.

She was hot early, too, leading the Muskies to a 30-23 halftime margin.

But the Hawks came out soaring in the second half.

Yanecek drained a long jumper, court magician Madison Dellamuth scored her first basket of the night and Yanecek converted a steal into a lay-up to pull Prairie to within a point.

A 3-pointer by Alisa Weiland on a nice feed from Dellamuth knotted the score at 32 with five minutes left in the third quarter.

Prairie took its first lead of the game a minute later, and Dellamuth extended it to five on her only 3-pointer of the night with two minutes left.

"I knew the next two possessions would be crucial," Doser said afterward.

The crafty Lerma popped in seven straight points to end the period.

From there, it was an up-and-down, back-and-forth dog fight to the very end.

Prairie committed 28 turnovers but compensated somewhat by sinking 18 of its 20 free throw

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attempts.

"The turnovers hurt us, and we got out-rebounded," Doser said. "But I really liked our energy tonight."

MUSCATINE (66): Emily Clemens 3 7-10 15, Megan Thiese 2 0-0 4, Alex Walgren 2 0-0 5, Leticia Lerma 12 2-4 28, Megan Beauchamp 1 0-0 2, Sam Kistler 0 0-0 0, Katie Shoultz 1 2-5 4, Kaylie Miller 2 0-0 4, Shalyn Greenhaw 2 0-0 4. 25 11-19 66.

PRAIRIE (63): Katilyn Yanecek 4 6-7 14, Cyerra Hutchins 3 4-4 10, Alisa Weiland 3 3-4 11, Courteney McCrary 7 1-1 17, Madison Dellamuth 2 4-4 9, Abby Ganske 0 0-0 0, Emilie Rotter 1 0-0 2, Mackenzie Serbousek 0 0-0 0. 20 18-20 63.

Halftime – Muscatine 30, Prairie 23. 3-point goals – Muscatine 5 (Clemens 2, Lerma 2, Walgren), Prairie 5 (Weiland 2, McCrary 2, Dellamuth). Total fouls – Muscatine 20, Prairie 19. Fouled out – Walgren, Greenhaw.