

Lions outlast shorthanded J-Hawk girls

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The die-hard Jefferson girls Tuesday night proved just as tough as their coach.

Despite surgery to remove kidney stones the day before, J-Hawk Coach Larry Niemeyer was on the bench to watch his seriously shorthanded team battle Linn-Mar tooth-and-nail in a 50-40 loss at home.

The young Lions (5-1, 2-1 Mississippi Valley Conference) were just too tall and too tenacious for the even younger band of blue.

And, in the end, the Jeff girls were, perhaps, too worn out.

Except for a single 42-second substitution at the end of the first half, the five Jefferson starters played the whole way against a bigger, fresher opponent.

“Too tired, nah, I don’t think so,” said Niemeyer, who himself looked a little peaked. “They shouldn’t have been.

“We practice two hours every day. And in the summer they’re used to playing three games back to back to back. Being tired is mostly a mental thing.”

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Well aware that Jefferson (2-3, 0-3) is down three players due to injuries, Linn-Mar Coach Michael Brandt said wearing down the J-Hawks was part of the game plan. He used a revolving-door rotation of eight players and pressed full-court from start to finish.

“That was one of our strategies,” Brandt said. “We wanted to make them work hard all four quarters. On the in-bounds plays and all up and down the floor.”

And it worked.

While Linn-Mar had only two fewer turnovers for the game (18 to 16), Niemeyer counted 10 passes thrown away either trying to put the ball in play or in the back court.

“Each one of them was worth four points, two we couldn’t score and two that they could score. The press really hurt us.

“We got out of rhythm. And we just didn’t do a good job getting open, and they did a good job filling up the passing lanes.”

The J-Hawks were especially error-prone in the second quarter and managed only one tip-in basket by Madison Blietz with a minute left as the Lions went ahead by 10. The teams played even up the rest of the way.

“Overall, I was very pleased,” said Brandt. “We’ve got a lot of young girls playing different roles. And we’re getting different contributions from all of them.

“I think we’re getting better every game. But, as I tell the girls, we’ve got 15 practice games left before the real season starts (in tournament play).”

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Niemeyer is just hoping his depleted squad holds together until reinforcements return from the injury list.

“I have a lot of respect for those girls,” Brandt said after the hard-fought contest. “They gut it out and give it their all for four quarters. It’s a hard-working group of girls.”

Shanice Cheatham and Alexis Libenguth led Linn-Mar with 10 points apiece.

Blietz led the J-Hawks with 12 points. Top scorer Taylor Jacobson missed her fourth straight game because of a high ankle sprain. Reserve post player Kiely Brathwaite missed her third straight game because of a knee injury.

LINN-MAR (50): Mykaela Brandt 2 1-2 7, Sara Strauel 2 0-0 4, Rachel Thrune 2 1-2 5, Shanice Cheatham 3 4-5 10, Courtney Major 2 0-0 4, Hannah Yearling 1 0-3 2, Kristen Eiles 3 0-0 8, Alexis Libenguth 4 2-2 10. Team total 19 8-14 50.

JEFFERSON (40): Kaitlyn Davidson 3 0-0 9, Madison Blietz 5 2-2 12, Dani Stromert 2 0-2 4, Rachel Broghammer 3 1-1 7, Maddie Koolbeck 3 0-0 8, Kylie Jonas 0 0-0 0. Team total 16 3-5 40.

Halftime – Linn-Mar 22, Jefferson 12. 3-point goals – Linn-Mar 4 (Brandt 2, Eiles 2), Jefferson 5 (Davidson 3, Koolbeck 2). Total fouls – Linn-Mar 14, Jefferson 12. Fouled out – none.

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