

## West ends Linn-Mar streak at 39

Written by Matt Sulentic, Waterloo Courier

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WATERLOO -- Powerhouse Linn-Mar roared into Siddens Gymnasium propelled by a 39-game Mississippi Valley Conference winning streak, tied for the longest in MVC history.

The Lions also boasted a 53-game regular season win streak, a No. 3 ranking in Class 4A, and a spotless 10-0 record. Not to mention the state's leading scorer and Connecticut recruit, Kiah Stokes.

Waterloo West shot past all that, and stopped a potentially record-breaking night, handing the Lions their first loss of the season, 53-44.

"We have had all week to practice and figure out how to beat them," said West's Jordan Johnston, who led the Wahawks with 22 points. "We utilized it tonight. We all really had the passion and really wanted this game.

"We came out to fight tonight."

West proved early that if the Lions wanted the record, they were going to have to earn it.

Johnston powered through the lane past a pair of Lion defenders to drop in a shot to put West ahead 8-4. Jadyn Spencer's 3-pointer extended that lead to 11-4.

"We are so proud of our players tonight," West Coach Dr. Anthony Pappas said. "They executed the game plan on both ends of the floor very well and beat a great team.

"And tonight, I thought Jordan Johnston played the game of her life. She did a great job on both ends for us."

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Linn-Mar fought back when Mykaela Brandt drilled two from beyond the arc, and the Lions took the lead 15-13, early in the second quarter.

The teams traded shots in the second quarter, and Linn-Mar held a 23-22 advantage at halftime. The Wahawks held Stokes, who averages 26.9 points per game, to just three in the first half.

"I think we need to credit Zinka Duric," said Spencer, who finished with 18 points. "She played awesome defense. Not many people can play that good of defense for 32 whole minutes, and she didn't get a break. She did a really great job tonight."

The Lions shooting turned as cold as the temperature outside in the third quarter. Linn-Mar scored just three points, and a buzzer-beater from Spencer made the score 32-26 with eight minutes to play.

"There are always teams that are going to bring their best games to come after us," Linn-Mar Coach Michael Brandt said. "We knew there was going to be a night when we needed to step up and knock down shots. We make a couple of those and it takes them out of their scheme, and we just didn't do that early enough tonight."

Linn-Mar got as close as three early in the fourth when Jenna Eells hit a 3-pointer to cut the West lead to 32-29.

The Wahawks dropped in a jumper, and Spencer bullied her way through the lane, and West held a 36-29 lead with six minutes to play.

"It was just an off-night," said Stokes, who finished with 13 points. "You have those sometimes. You win by shooting great, and you lose by shooting bad."

Johnston slammed the door on the Linn-Mar rally with a steal and a lay-up to put West ahead 46-39 with 1:05 to play.

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"This win proves that we are a tough conference, top to bottom," said Spencer. "Anyone can beat anyone. This win doesn't mean anything now. Now we have to keep playing everyone strong, because every night MVC competition is tough."

Added Pappas, "Our players rose to the occasion. I am just so proud of them, I can't even tell you. I really feel we are getting better individually and collectively we are playing the best basketball of their whole careers."

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LINN-MAR (44): Mykaela Brandt 2 2-4 8, Rachel Thrune 2 0-0 5, Kailee Karr 4 0-1 9, Jenna Eells 2 3-4 9, Kiah Stokes 3 7-9 13, Leandra Martins 0 0-0 0, Shanice Cheatham 0 0-0 0, MacKenzie Seckman 0 0-0 0, Sara Strauel 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 12-17 44  
WEST (53): Sarah Sand 0 3-4 3, Hannah Swartzendruber 0 0-0 0, Jordan Johnston 6 10-12 22, Zinka Duric 2 0-0 4, Jadyn Spencer 5 6-10 18, Haley Puk 3 0-0 6. Totals 16 19-28 53

Halftime -- Linn-Mar 23, Waterloo West 22. 3-point goals -- Linn-Mar 6 (Thrune, Brandt 2, Eells 2, Karr); West 2 (Spencer 2). Total fouls -- Linn-Mar 19, West 18. Fouled out -- Karr, Brandt, Thrune.