

Indians give O'Donnell a happy birthday

Written by Tom Fruehling

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When Marion Coach Brian O'Donnell saw before the season that Williamsburg was scheduled on his birthday, he had a request for his wife.

"I told her I hoped she'd get me something nice, because I wasn't sure I'd have a fun day."

The Williamsburg Raiders started the year ranked No. 1 in the state in Class 3A, while the gritty Marion girls were coming off of a 6-16 season marked by one heart-breaking loss after another.

But they came through when it counted Tuesday night in their home gym, delivering a 48-46 birthday surprise that gives them a 6-0 start.

"It's still early in the season, obviously, but I'm very happy," said O'Donnell, the second-year coach who turned 37. "We had so many games last year when we just barely came out on the short end that this win is phenomenal.

"These girls are such good kids. They've worked so hard and competed in every game. I'm really pleased something special like this can happen."

His tough-as-nails team showed up in the polls this week at No. 13. Williamsburg, meanwhile, fell from the top to No. 4 after losing to Benton Community and at 7-2 has dropped two games

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in seven days by a total of four points.

The contest Tuesday was well-played by both teams from beginning to end. And Marion finally won it at the free throw line, but not without almost giving it away.

The Indians had the ball and a 46-42 lead with a minute to go when normally automatic shooter Dani Peyton missed the front of a 1-and-1. Sophomore sub Emi Banes did the same 15 seconds later.

"I'm pretty sure I know what we're going to be doing in practice tomorrow," the always cool and calm Peyton said afterward.

With renewed hope, Raider Molly Boland raced down court and scored her only basket of the night with a 3-pointer from the corner to make it a one-point game, 46-45.

Williamsburg immediately got the ball back on a tie-up, but McCall Meade threw up an air ball.

Again, Peyton was put on the line, this time with 21 seconds left. She made the first and missed the second, giving Marion a precarious 47-45 advantage.

The game then hinged on Raider 6-foot senior star Mackenzie Bigbee, fouled while shooting with six seconds left. She, too, made one but missed the next, making it 47-46.

It might have been game over. But with 4.2 seconds to go, Indian senior stalwart Jessie Kramer made the first and missed the second of two free throws, leaving the score 48-46.

An open jump shot by Williamsburg's Paige Greiner fell short at the buzzer.

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"I didn't feel any pressure on the free throws," the dependable Kramer said later. "They felt good. But even when I missed, I knew our defense would stop them."

Indeed, it was the defense that O'Donnell mostly credited for the hard-fought victory.

"Williamsburg is such a good team that I knew we had to out-hustle them. And the girls did that. They were scrappy all night and made all the little hustle plays when we needed them," he said. "It got exciting at the end with the free throws. But we found a way to win, so we'll take it."

"I would have been awfully disappointed if that last shot had gone in. But I still would have been thrilled with our effort the whole game."

His gutsy girls out-rebounded the Raiders, 34-28. Banes had seven rebounds, including four on offense, and Kramer six.

Big freshman Michalyn Mohr came off the bench to play much of the game. She led the Indians with 11 points and also pulled down six boards. More importantly, she clogged up the middle on defense and pestered Bigbee all night.

"She understands the game so well and always knows right where to be," O'Donnell said of Mohr, who is seeing more action with sparkplug junior guard Micaela Combs sidelined since the third game with a stomach illness.

Peyton led Marion with five steals in a relatively cleanly played game. The Indians had 11 turnovers and the Raiders only eight. Bigbee led her team with 13 points and 12 rebounds.

WILLIAMSBURG (46): Paige Greiner 4 0-0 10, Lindsay Schlabaugh 4 1-1 9, McCall Meade 1 1-1 3, Mackenzie Bigbee 4 5-8 13, Molly Boland 1 0-0 3, Tina Lane 2 0-0 5, Kali Slaymaker 0

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0-0 0, Sadie Ritchie 1 0-0 3, Olivia Bigbee 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 7-10 46.

MARION (48): Allison Scott 3 2-2 8, Jessie Kramer 3 4-5 10, Beth Knapp 0 0-0 0, Dani Peyton 2 4-6 8, Alyssa Jones 2 0-0 4, Amanda Sahm 0 1-2 1, Brooke Cole 0 0-0 0, Michalyn Mohr 5 1-1 11, Emi Banes 1 4-5 6. Totals 16 16-21 48.

Halftime – Marion 26, Williamsburg 23. 3-point goals – Williamsburg 5 (Greiner 2, Lane, Boland, Ritchie), Marion 0. Total fouls – Williamsburg 19, Marion 11. Fouled out – Lane, Jones.