

Make sure you see Paige in person

Written by Bob Brooks

Thursday, 02 February 2012 20:20 - Last Updated Thursday, 02 February 2012 23:31



I would like to start today by writing about the Linn-Mar versus Cedar Rapids Prairie boys basketball game last Friday at Linn-Mar.

In my view, taken in its total body of play, it was one of the most unusual and thrilling high school games that I've seen in a long, long time. I usually take the game program and keep score and make notes, and this resulted in some scratching for a couple of pages.

When Linn-Mar trailed 26-6 and later 35-18, I wrote that the Lions were playing with feet of clay and the basketball must have had grease on it. Their shooting and passing, at best, were erratic.

On the other side of the coin, Prairie under second-year coach James Moses - who was dressed like the king of England - was a well-oiled, disciplined machine. They feature Matt MacDougall, a player who holds the team together.

At one time in the second half the score reached 52-39 for Prairie. And I thought, what an upset this is going to be. I kept, though, in the back of my mind that Prairie had not heard from Marcus Paige yet.

Midway in the third quarter, Paige hit a couple of left-handed jumpers and I thought to myself, here he comes, but he certainly doesn't have enough time to turn the game around. But yes he did.

Marcus put on one of the best individual shows of basketball skill that you'll ever see. Both teams were into it, and so was the Prairie rooting section and the Linn-Mar rooters. And Marcus was feeling it with that enthusiasm in the gym.

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It wasn't all about a 36-point second half for Paige. It was about his defense, ball stealing, rebounding and passing. It was a remarkable show, to be sure, and his total of 46 points broke the Linn-Mar single-game mark set by Jason Bohannon of 45.

The final score was 68-67 for Linn-Mar. Believe it or not, Prairie got behind with a couple of minutes left in the game. They came back and had the thing tied, and they had Mr. MacDougall at the free throw line for a one-and-one with three-tenths of a second left that could have brought victory.

Matthew is a fine player, but the free throw touched the rim, bounced left rather than right and fell incomplete. Game over.

I would like to congratulate Prairie on its performance and its sportsmanship in a pressurized ballgame. It was a rare occasion when one player can beat five. And I told Marcus Paige after the game to be sure and send that tape to Roy Williams, because Roy hasn't seen the total package.

There's even more. Linn-Mar played in a showcase tournament Saturday night in Dubuque against a Chicago suburban team and Paige scored 34 points, making it a grand total of 80 points in a 24-hour period.

A note to basketball fans: Don't let Marcus get out of town without seeing him play.

I also attended Dubuque Wahlert's 62-57 win over Xavier on Tuesday night. Xavier sophomore Matt Nelson, a 6-foot-8 center, looks to be a future "big" for the Saints. He is getting better each time out.

Eric May's brother, Jake, hustled in 25 points for Wahlert in that game. Eric May plays for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

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And a recruiting note: Of the top recruiting schools of 2007, a survey shows that only 48 percent of the players recruited that year played for their original selection. So don't get too involved in recruiting gurus.

(Bob Brooks is sports director at KMRY and has been one of the leading voices of college and prep sports in Eastern Iowa for more than 65 years. He is a 10-time winner of the Iowa Sportscaster of the Year Award, and was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, Indiana in 2004. His sports reports can be heard weekday afternoons at 4:30 and 5:30, and Saturdays at 6:40 for the Hawkeye football wrap-up.)