

Lions boys show why they're No. 1

Written by

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The Linn-Mar Lions showed why they are the No. 1 ranked boys basketball team in the state Friday, scoring from all over the court and employing suffocating full-court pressure defense to beat Xavier, 69-45, at Linn-Mar in a Class 4A substate semifinal.

Senior guard Shane Benton led the way for Linn-Mar (22-0) with 21 points and North Carolina-bound junior Marcus Paige added 20 points for the Lions. Senior center Ryan Mains paced Xavier (7-16) with 10 points.

Linn-Mar started the game slow. Xavier's final lead came at 8-7 with 3:18 left in the opening quarter.

"We got off to a slow start and a lot of that has to do with having a week off and having a bye," said Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson. "It's hard to stay sharp when you're used to playing and then you just practice for five days."

The Lions employed their full-court pressure and picked up the pace. Linn-Mar scored 10 straight points in the final 3 minutes of the first quarter. The Lions continued to sprint away from the Saints in the second period and put the game out of reach with a 28-point halftime lead.

They were able to get going in transition and pick up the pace, Robertson said.

"We wanted to get the tempo going, obviously, our full-court pressure is what we rely on to do that," Robertson said. "We got some transition baskets in the second quarter and it just broke the game open and got everybody relaxed and playing. When we are playing that style our guys are having fun and that is probably our strength."

The Lions stretched their lead to as many as 33 before Xavier started to chip away. Despite the one-sided score, the Saints battled hard in the second half, coming back to within 21 points with just under 4 minutes left in the game. But Linn-Mar never let them get any closer than that.

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"(The) second half, I thought we got a little sloppy with things," Robertson said. "Sometimes it's hard playing with a big lead when the other team comes out and keeps fighting. We didn't match that intensity in the third quarter."

With the win, the Lions move on to Tuesday's 6:30 p.m. substate final at the U.S. Cellular Center where they will face North Scott. The Lancers beat Pleasant Valley, 46-44, Friday.

Although Robertson was not sure who they would be facing immediately after the game he was confident that his team would be up to the challenge.

"We will have a couple good days to get ready," he said. "Our guys know what's at stake, that's what's nice about this team. We have a lot of seniors, a lot of experience, so they know what it's going to take Tuesday night."

Senior forward Ian McBrayer played for the first time since he was injured Feb. 8 and scored six points. Senior forward Josh Montague remained sidelined with a leg injury. Senior guard Michael Thul left the game in the first quarter with a bad ankle.

XAVIER (45): McLaughlin 2 2-4 6, McDermott 1 0-0 3, Hosch 2 0-0 5, Dunkirk 2 0-0 5, Valentine 1 1-2 3, Ropp 1 2-2 5, Clasen 1 3-5 5, Mains 4 2-3 10, Mattke 0 3-6 3, Sampson 0 0-0 0, Frazier 0 0-0 0, Woods 0 0-0 0, Schulte 0 0-0 0, Nelson 0 0-0 0, Kokontis 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 13-22 45.

LINN-MAR (69): Soyer 0 2-2 2, Kruise 2 0-0 4, Benton 6 8-10 21, Paige 7 4-4 20, Johnson 0 1-2 1, Bohannon 3 3-4 10, McBrayer 3 0-0 6, Gentzler 1 1-2 3, Gogg 1 0-0 2, Thul 0 0-0 0, Lassen 0 0-0 0, Lancial 0 0-0 0, Henry 0 0-0 0, Hutchins 0 0-0 0, Malone 0 0-0 0. Totals 23 19-24 69.

Halftime -- Linn-Mar 44, Xavier 16. 3 point goals -- Linn-Mar 4 (Paige 2, Benton, Bohannon), Xavier 4 (McDermott, Hosch, Dunkirk, Ropp).