

Washington girls bump off Prairie

Written by Tom Fruehling

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A packed house at the Washington gym Friday night got their money's worth in the opening game of a doubleheader as the Warrior girls went right down to the wire to edge Prairie, 67-60.

It was a foul-plagued affair with 41 whistles, but fast-paced from start to finish.

And it wasn't always pretty. Each team committed 20 turnovers. But it was exciting and entertaining the whole way.

"It was the kind of game you love to have on a Friday night," Washington coach Frank Howell said. "Part of a doubleheader with more life in the gym. And a close game between two evenly matched teams.

"Both teams played really hard. Whichever team was going to win was going to deserve it. I'm sure it was a fun one to watch."

That it was.

For one thing, the Warriors (8-6) relied mostly on crowd-pleasing 3-point shots. They took 31 of them (three more than their 2-point attempts). They made only nine from long range (for 29 percent), but they came at crucial times.

After an 11-11 first quarter, Prairie (5-7) went on a 10-0 terror with some long bombs of its

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own. Freshman Sarah Schmitt hit two straight from way out and then another that was barely inside the arc.

Washington came right back, though, with back-to-back layups by senior Anne Visser and sophomore Vanessa Eniola and then a trey by senior Payton Bruner.



Following a Hawk tip-in by Olivia Usher, Bruner reeled off seven more points in a row on two free throws, a tip and another three. Suddenly, Washington had retaken the lead.

“Those long shots look a lot prettier when they fall,” Howell noted.

There were more to come in the third quarter.

With her team sitting on a two-point lead, Warrior ninth-grader Caitlin Riley came off the bench to hit two long 3s and Visser added another for nine straight points in less than a minute.

“We needed that,” Howell said. “We tell the girls, ‘If you’re going to make a mistake, make it an aggressive mistake. If you’re open, let it

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fly.”

The 5-foot-5 Riley sank two more bombs in the quarter, with all four coming on dish-out passes from 5-foot-1 point guard Joniqua Clark.

“I had confidence in the freshman,” the tiny playmaker said. “They were all in transition. We made eye contact, and I got her the ball.”

Clark herself made all nine of her points in the second half, including five straight free throws down the stretch.

“Coach told me at halftime to have a killer instinct,” she pointed out. “And we practice free throws all the time. If we miss, we have to run. And I don’t like to run, except in games.”

For her part, Clark said she wasn’t a bit hesitant to fire off a string of long shots in a tight ballgame. “I just felt it,” she explained calmly.

Prairie whittled down the 11-point deficit to four points in the fourth quarter, thanks to a couple more 3's from Schmitt and relentless drives from the non-stop Usher.

Schmitt ended up with a career-high 17 points while Usher tallied 26. On the Warrior side, Visser and Bruner each had 15.

“Usher is such a good player,” Howell commented, “that it took a good defensive effort across the board to try to contain her penetration.”

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Prairie coach Josh Bentley was not displeased with his team's effort, despite the nail-biting loss.

"I thought we competed," he said. "We went after the loose balls and we rebounded pretty well.

"We just didn't do a good enough job identifying their shooters. And they had those two big runs in the second and third quarters.

"It's tough to overcome when you're trying to play catch-up."

PRAIRIE (60): Altenhofen 0 0-0 0, Schmitt 6 1-2 17, Usher 7 10-11 26, Person 3 1-4 7, Wagemester 3 2-7 8, Moenk 0 0-0 0, Kuch 1 0-0 2, Adams 0 0-0 0, Stoffer 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 14-24 60.

WASHINGTON (67): Clark 2 5-5 9, Visser 5 2-2 15, Bruner 5 3-5 15, Puk 1 2-4 4, Johnson 1 2-2 4, Carey 0 0-0 0, V. Eniola 3 0-0 6, B.Hoeger 1 0-0 2, O'Donnell 0 0-0 0, Riley 4 0-0 12, Mia 0 0-0 0. Totals 22 14-18 67.

Halftime – Prairie 29, Washington 29. 3-point goals – Prairie 6 (Schmitt 4, Usher 2), Washington 9 (Riley 4, Visser 3, Bruner 2).