

Linn-Mar won't hesitate with Paige in control

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 29 November 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 January 2011 01:10

Marcus Paige dribbled up the left sideline during the Jamboree at Kennedy and hesitated in front of the Linn-Mar bench with a defender on his hip, so Coach Chris Robertson looked away to see where Paige might pass the ball.

When Robertson looked back, Linn-Mar's exciting point guard was finishing an easy layup without a defender in sight. They call that a hesitation blow-by, and few people do it better than Paige.

"I missed it," said Robertson, smiling.

Robertson heard about it, though. That's why he was smiling.

"It's kind of scary," Robertson said, "but he's improvea so much from last year to this year."

It's scary good for the Lions, but scary bad for opponents. Paige, a 6-foot-1 junior with superior skills, has college coaches drooling from coast to coast, but he plans to keep his suitors in suspense.

Paige played in the "low 150s" last season, but has gained weight and muscle."I'm pushing 165 now," he said.

"I worked a lot on strength. Strength and agility and stuff. Getting stronger. I matured a little bit," he said. "I feel a lot better than when I was sick at the end of the year."

Paige battled mononucleosis during the last month of the 2009-10 campaign and missed some games. He played in the state tournament, but Robertson figures he was only 60 or 70 percent.

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"So it's nice to see him at 100 percent," Robertson remarked. "He's gotten a lot stronger, he's grown a little bit. That all helps."

Iowa, Iowa State and Northern Iowa have offered him scholarships. Kansas wants him. North Carolina has visited several times, and Paige hopes to visit the Tar Heels in December. There's also Virginia, UCLA and Stanford in hot pursuit.

"You just about name it, and they're all interested," Robertson said. "He's going to have his choice. He's got some great options."

But not yet.

"I've been doing a lot of sorting through stuff," Paige said. "I think at the end of the season I want to have a list of about six, or something like that. But I probably won't worry about that too much until the season is over."

So there's no "Final 6" right now? No front-runner?

"Nope," he replied.

Morgan Paige, currently a freshman on the University of Wisconsin women's basketball team, was heavily recruited as well, so Marcus learned a few things from watching his sister.

"It's fun getting a chance to talk to all these coaches, but it's getting to the point where it's a little rough," he said. "I'm trying to stay in contact with all these different coaches, but it's going well."

Robertson thinks Paige is handling things extremely well.

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"The neat thing about him, he's taken it all in stride," Robertson said. "He's looking for the right things. He wants a good education, he wants to go where he can play. He's going to have a difficult decision, but he's going to have a great choice."

Linn-Mar is loaded with talent, as usual. Matt Bohannon, a sharpshooter who averaged 17.4 points last season, has signed with Northern Iowa, and Shane Benton, a 6-3 guard, has signed with North Dakota. The Lions also have strength up front, with 6-6 Ian McBrayer and 6-7 Josh Montague.

Bohannon, Benton, McBrayer and Montague are seniors, giving the Lions an experienced starting lineup with Paige.

"We've got great leadership, so that's a great place to start," Robertson said. "Matt, Shane and Marcus are all three-year varsity players, so they've been through the battles. They've been to the state tournament, so they know what it's going to take."

Robertson called McBrayer "a pleasant surprise," 15 pounds heavier and a strong, solid, tough kid. He also likes Montague and his ability to score.

"We need those guys to rebound and defend first. Baskets become secondary," Robertson said.

The Lions graduated Will Roth, Darius Stokes, Jody Henton and several other seniors, perhaps making depth a concern this season.

Linn-Mar went 23-2 last year and lost to Southeast Polk, 41-38, in the semifinals of the Class 4A state tournament. Robertson has compiled a flashy 114-15 record in five years, highlighted by a state title in 2007 and conference titles in 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010.

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Linn-Mar always aims high.

"It's looking pretty good," Paige said. "We're looking to get out and run and really put pressure on the other team."

Paige will have the ball in his hands.

"He's a special player," Robertson said, "and obviously we're going to rely on him in a lot of ways."

Linn-Mar opens the season Tuesday night at Waukee. The home opener is Saturday night against Bettendorf.

"We're excited," Robertson said. "We're excited to get going."

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ROSTER

Seniors (10)

Michael Thul (5-10), Nick Soyer (6-3), Mason Krusie (6-0), Shane Benton (6-3), Nate Johnson (5-11), Braxton Lancial (5-11), Matt Bohannon (6-4), Ian McBrayer (6-6), Josh Montague (6-7), Nick Gentzler (6-0).

Juniors (7)

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Marcus Paige (6-1), Jon Kitelinger (5-9), Andy Henry (6-2), Alex Holland (5-9), Terrance Thompkins (6-0), Jacob Hutchins (6-2), Josh Malone (6-3).

Sophomores (2)

Matthew Lassen (6-4), Derik Gogg (6-7).

SCHEDULE

Tuesday, Nov. 30 — at Waukee, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 4 — Bettendorf, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 10 — at Iowa City West, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 14 — Cedar Falls, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 17 — Prairie, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 18 — vs. Mount Pleasant, U.S. Cellular Center, 8:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 4 — Waterloo West, 7:30 p.m.

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Friday, Jan. 7 — Xavier, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 8 — vs. Apple Valley (Minn.), Target Center, Minneapolis

Tuesday, Jan. 11 — at Dubuque Hempstead, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 14 — at Washington, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 15 — vs. Madison Memorial, LaCrosse (Wis.) Civic Center, TBA

Friday, Jan. 21 — Kennedy, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 25 — at Waterloo East, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 28 — at Prairie, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 1 — Iowa City High, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 4 — at Xavier, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 8 — at Dubuque Senior, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 11 — Washington, 7:30 p.m.

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Tuesday, Feb. 15 — at Jefferson, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 17 — Dubuque Wahlert, 7:30 p.m.

Feb. 21, 25, March 1 — Substate

March 9-12 — State, Des Moines