

Lions destroy Hempstead

Written by Michael Schmidt

Tuesday, 11 January 2011 22:38 - Last Updated Tuesday, 11 January 2011 22:56

DUBUQUE, Iowa – Call them the Duke Blue Devils of the Midwest.

If Linn-Mar coach Chris Robertson had his way, his Lions would execute in the same manner as the defending men's national champions. Even if the newest North Carolina Tar Heel disagrees.

"I love to watch (Duke) play, but now Marcus (Paige) says I can't watch them," said Robertson, referring to the junior Linn-Mar point guard who verbally committed to North Carolina last Saturday.

Paige and his teammates turned up the heat defensively Tuesday and cruised to a 72-25 victory over Dubuque Hempstead at Moody Gymnasium. The Lions (10-0), ranked No. 1 in the latest Associated Press Class 4A poll, broke the game open with a 25-5 run to start the second quarter.

Defensively, Linn-Mar hounded Hempstead with its full-court press. On the offensive end, Paige found weapons Shane Benton and Matt Bohannon for easy open looks.

Paige scored a game-high 18 points for Linn-Mar, while Bohannon drained a trio of 3-pointers en route to 15 points. Benton scored seven points, and the Lions had 11 players make a dent in the scoring column.

Linn-Mar led by 33 points at halftime, shooting a blistering 20-for-29 from the floor over the first 16 minutes.

It took only 90 seconds of the third quarter for the Lions to stretch their lead to 35 points, instituting the Iowa High School Athletic Association's new rule of continuous clock during lopsided contests. The clock only stopped for timeouts.

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All told, it was just another day at the office for the Lions.

“Our defense makes us go,” Robertson said. “If we can create turnovers and get the game going fast, that suits our style of play. We mixed some things up early, but then we found the press was working for us. With our personnel, we’ve got to deflect passes and get our hands on balls.”

Even when it was able to break Linn-Mar’s stifling press, Hempstead (3-5) struggled in half-court sets. The Lions limited the Mustangs to only 24 field-goal attempts for the game.

“Our press looked fantastic,” Paige said. “We were all in the right spots and didn’t foul as much. That was good to see. We just take a lot of pride in our defense.”

One of four senior starters, Bohannon said he tries to lead by example. He knows that if the Lions can stay focused, the sky is the limit.

“We have a routine that we try to set every night,” Bohannon said. “We try to keep everybody on the same page and know that we need this kind of intensity every night. So far, we’ve done a pretty good job of them. We just want to keep this intensity and play as hard as we can.”

LINN-MAR (72): Shane Benton 3 1-1 7, Marcus Paige 7 3-5 18, Matt Bohannon 6 0-0 15, Ian McBrayer 1 0-2 2, Josh Montague 3 2-5 8, Michael Thul 0 0-0 0, Derik Gogg 1 0-0 2, Mason Krusie 1 0-0 2, Matthew Lassen 1 0-0 3, Nick Soyer 3 0-0 6, Braxton Lancial 0 0-0 0. Nick Gentzler 2 2-2 7, Josh Malone 0 0-0 0, Jacob Hutchins 1 0-0 2. Totals 29 8-15 72.

DUBUQUE HEMPSTEAD (25): TJ Johnson 2 2-2 7, Brad Duwe 2 1-5 5, Alex Smith 0 0-1 0, Cody Leach 1 0-0 2, Gage Heffernan 3 3-3 9, Mike Canfield 1 0-0 2, Cory Crawford 0 0-0 0, Connor Sindberg 0 0-0 0, Peter Keleher 0 0-0 0, Carson Hillery 0 0-0 0, Jon Hermsen 0 0-0 0, Shawn Breitbach 0 0-0 0, Josh Viertel 0 0-0 0, Mike Farrey 0 0-0 0, Nico Wardell 0 0-0 0. Totals 9 6-11 25.

Halftime – Linn-Mar 50, Hempstead 17. 3-point goals – L-M: Paige, Bohannon 3, Lassen, Gentzler; H: Johnson. Total fouls – Linn-Mar 9, Hempstead 14. Fouled out – None. Technical fouls – None.