

No. 8 Lions top Hawks for 8th in row

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jaime Printy Brandt and her husband Danny are expecting their first child in July, but she's having too much fun as the Linn-Mar girls basketball coach to step aside next season.

Brandt plans to return for her third year as head coach next season despite becoming a new mother.

"I do. Yup. No worries," she said Friday night with a smile. "I'm going to stick around. That's the plan."

"My husband will bring our baby to the games, I guess. It will be a gym rat, just like me."

Brandt and the eighth-ranked Lions defeated Cedar Rapids Prairie, 50-35, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game to finish the regular season with an eight-game winning streak Friday.

Linn-Mar finished second in the Valley Division of the MVC with an 11-2 conference record and will take a 17-4 mark into the Class 5A regional semifinals next Saturday night at home against Prairie or Marshalltown.

"It's nice to have a whole week this coming week to work on ourselves," Brandt said. "We're excited about that."

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Amanda Ollinger collected another double-double for the Lions Friday with 18 points and 14 rebounds, which was another typical night at the office for the future Iowa Hawkeye, but Claire Larson gave Linn-Mar a nice boost off the bench with 10 points.

Larson had scored only 24 points all season, but she helped the Lions defeat Xavier in overtime on Tuesday and was a key factor again in the victory against Prairie.

"I feel more comfortable now than I have been in the past," said Larson, a 5-foot-8 senior who is playing some of the best basketball of her career right now. "We have a lot of fun in practice. My team always pumps me up."

Brandt said the Lions have gotten big contributions from different players in different games. This time it was Larson who came to the rescue when nobody else beside Ollinger scored in double figures.



"She's one of those girls that as the season goes along, she keeps playing better and better," the coach remarked. "She hit a big shot against Xavier that I think really built her confidence up."

"She's kind of accepted her role and she's one of our best defenders. It's good to see her kind of peak at this time and we can trust her coming in off the bench."

Linn-Mar held Prairie to four points in the fourth period to pull away and ice the victory. Larson

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began the fourth period with a 3-pointer to give the Lions a 42-31 advantage to get things started.

"Our defense was pretty good," Brandt said. "We had a couple of breakdowns, but I thought we played hard. I thought our second half was better."

The Lions were sitting with a 9-4 record when they went on their eight-game winning streak. They finished all alone in second place in the Valley Division of the MVC standings, one game behind Cedar Falls and one game ahead of Kennedy.

"I'm happy with it," Brandt said. "Our goal is to get better each game and peak towards the end.

"We've won eight straight and we're playing some of the best ball we have. We kind of learned from our losses at the beginning, so we're definitely happy and we're ready to get to work for the postseason."

Linn-Mar would host 13th-ranked Dowling Catholic or Des Moines East in the regional finals Feb. 23 if they beat Prairie or Marshalltown in the semifinals next Saturday.

The Lions need two more victories to reach the state tournament.

"I think we have a chance," Larson said. "It's not going to be easy, but we have a chance. I think we can do it."

Makenzie Stoffer scored nine points for Prairie (10-11, 4-9). Olivia Usher, who was averaging 14.6 points, was held to three points for the Hawks.

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LINN-MAR (50): Johnson 1 1-2 3, Akers 1 0-0 3, Frese 0 0-0 0, Lancial 0 3-4 3, Murphy 0 0-0 0, Spies 3 2-2 8, Finley 2 1-2 5, Larson 2 5-6 10, Ollinger 7 2-4 18. Totals 16 14-20 50.

PRAIRIE (35): Moenk 0 0-0 0, Altenhofen 3 0-0 7, Schmitt 3 0-1 6, Adams 0 0-0 0, Usher 1 1-2 3, Wagemester 3 2-2 8, Kuch 0 0-0 0, Stoffer 4 1-3 9, Person 1 0-0 2. Totals 15 4-8 35.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 26, Prairie 18. 3-point goals - Linn-Mar 4 (Ollinger 2, Akers 1, Larson 1), Prairie 1 (Altenhofen 1).