

Title-clinching victory in regular-season finale allows team to silence naysayers

As the final seconds ticked off the clock last Thursday in Fredonia, Ozaukee High School girls' basketball coach Lee LeMahieu turned to his starters, who had just taken their seats on the bench.

"Enjoy this one. This is huge," he told them. "This is so huge."

"This" was Ozaukee's 48-33 win over visiting Elkhart Lake, a victory that gave the Warriors a share of the Central Lakeshore Conference title.

Ozaukee finished CLC play with a 16-2 record, tying Oostburg for the top spot. Both of Oostburg's losses were at the hands of the Warriors.

Ozaukee's only defeats came against third-place Howards Grove and fourth-place Elkhart Lake.

"Winning conference is a great accomplishment for this team," said LeMahieu, whose squad overcame the loss of several key players from last season, including two who transferred to other schools.

"It's even more special considering we were picked fourth and fifth in two preseason polls. These girls have surprised a lot of people, including me. They deserve a lot of credit."

From the opening tip, the Warriors showed how much they wanted to win. Ozaukee scored the first 13 points and sprinted to a 21-7 lead by the end of the opening period.

The Warriors made nine of their first 12 field-goal attempts and got points from each of their starters during the fast start.

Elkhart Lake's comeback attempt took a major blow when starting center Anna Vollrath went down hard on a foul late in the first quarter and left the game. She did not return.

After taking a 32-15 lead into halftime, Ozaukee cooled off in the third quarter,

CLC crown speaks volume for Ozaukee girls

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when it failed to score from the field. The Warriors' only points came on a pair of free throws by guard Kaitlyn Thill, who gave them a 34-23 lead by the end of the period.

"We struggled offensively in the third quarter but played well defensively to keep us in front," LeMahieu said.

With Elkhart Lake still in contention, the Warriors needed some players to step up and seal the victory on Senior Night. Jumping at the chance were Thill and Erin Hartnett, who combined for all but three of their team's points in the final three quarters.

Thill sparked a late run by scoring 10 of her game-high 25 points in the final period. Hartnett, a center, had Ozaukee's four other points in the quarter and finished with 13.

During a timeout late in the third quarter, LeMahieu reminded his team that it had to finish the job against the Resorters.

"They're not going to roll over and let you have it. You have to want it," he said.

Elkhart Lake couldn't get any closer than nine points the rest of the way.

The Resorters (11-7) were led by Kate Vollrath's 13 points.

Hillary Johnson grabbed a team-high eight rebounds for Ozaukee, and Hartnett had seven.

This week, the Warriors took an overall record of 18-4 into WIAA Division 3 tournament play, starting with a quarterfinal game Tuesday (see related story).