

Schulte 'not against' Class 3A for Saints

Written by Jim Ecker
Monday, 28 October 2013 22:03 -

The Xavier Saints have rolled up an 8-1 record this season in the Mississippi Valley Conference, outscored their opponents 272-61 and pitched five shutouts on their way to the Class 4A playoffs.

Imagine what they might accomplish next season if they drop to Class 3A.

It could happen if the Iowa High School Athletic Association puts all the Class 4A schools in Eastern Iowa into districts next year and abolishes the Mississippi Valley Conference as a football league. If that happens, Xavier could elect to compete in Class 3A based on its enrollment.

"I'm not against it," Xavier football coach Duane Schulte said Monday. "I don't know if I'm for it, but we haven't really sat down and talked about it as a school.

"I've always thought that we should play the same size schools that we are," he said.

Some of the schools in the Mississippi Valley Conference are twice as big as Xavier. Theoretically, Class 4A is supposed to be for the 48 largest schools in the state and Xavier ranks No.52.

The Saints agreed to play Class 4A football when they joined the Mississippi Valley Conference in 1998 when their school opened. They have fared very well, compiling a 107-58 record during that time against Class 4A teams with 10 trips to the Class 4A playoffs in 16 years.

Xavier won the Class 4A state title in 2006 with a 13-0 record and finished second last year with a 13-1 mark, so the track record proves they can compete at the highest level in Iowa.

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Schulte does not accept the notion that the Saints might win a series of lopsided games if they drop to Class 3A next year. "I don't know if you can say that, because there are some pretty good 3A schools, too," he remarked. "It depends on your schedule."

Decorah (9-0), Solon (8-1), Washington, Iowa (8-1), West Delaware (8-1) and Williamsburg (7-2) are Class 3A schools. So are Anamosa (0-9), Oelwein (0-9), Benton Community (2-7) and Vinton-Shellsburg (2-7).

Class 3A schools currently play six district games and three non-district games. The district games are used to determine the playoffs, while the three non-district games are not.

Based on that formula, Schulte thinks Xavier might be able to arrange some attractive dates for its non-district games if it drops to Class 3A next year.

"You can still play 4A schools," he noted. "You can kind of get the best of both worlds in that regard. You could get some interesting games scheduled."

"Who's not to say Xavier and Dowling don't play each other in a non-district game? Something like that."

In any case, Schulte has more pressing issues on his mind this week. The Saints host Clinton (4-5) in the opening round of the Class 4A playoffs Wednesday night.

Xavier won four straight playoff games last year before losing to Ankeny in the state finals, 23-17. Schulte is not ready to discuss making another long run in the playoffs or playing for the championship again.

"I'm just going to try and beat Clinton," he said.

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The Saints have one of the toughest defenses in the state again this year, allowing just 6.8 points per game. That's even better than last year, when they allowed 8.3 points per game during the regular season.

The biggest difference on the team this year has been the offense, which averaged 42.6 points during the regular season in 2012 compared to 30.2 points this year. That's a drop of two touchdowns per game.

Last year, all-state quarterback Reggie Schulte passed for 2,501 yards and 37 touchdowns in 14 games. This year, Quinton Scholer has passed for 807 yards and 11 TDs. Schulte averaged 178.6 passing yards per game, whereas Scholer is averaging 89.7 passing yards per game.

Tailback Brendan Miller has become a bigger part of the offense as a senior, averaging 124.2 yards per game in 2013 compared to 76.3 yards in 2012. Miller has rushed for 2,186 yards in his career and needs 298 yards in the playoffs to break the school record of 2,483 set by Will Martin in 2005 and 2006.