

Saints trim Cougars in MSR Classic

Written by Tom Fruehling
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While the basketball season officially tips off for them next week, both the Xavier and Kennedy boys were still feeling the effects of football in their hardcourt matchup Saturday at the MetroSportsReport.com Pride Challenge at Johnson Hall.

Several Saints who may be starters sat on the sidelines since they've barely practiced after playing in last week's gridiron state championship. As for the Cougars, their few football players played but were still a tad rusty switching suddenly from one sport to another.

The game itself on the Kirkwood Community College campus sometimes had a scrum-like feel to it as 41 fouls were called, and each team made more free throws than field goals.

Xavier won it, 54-47, with a furious fourth-quarter comeback, mostly because nine of its 14 baskets came from 3-point range.

"I kept telling them to drive, but they didn't listen to me," joked Saints Coach Ryan Luehrsmann about the barrage of long distance shots.

Lacking a lot of beef in the lineup for now, Luehrsmann lamented, leads to a different game plan.

"We're kind of small when we don't have our big boys in there," he said, referring mostly to 6-foot-8 center Matt Nelson, an all-state football player.

Two mainstays from last year who did play showed they're in fine form already for Xavier. Juniors Adam McDermott and Calvin Winker, who saw a lot of action as sophomores, led the Saints in scoring with 21 and 15 points, respectively.

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The tallest of the Saints Saturday at 6-foot-3 and 6-foot-4, they nevertheless connected on five bombs from way outside.

“I was pretty happy with the way we played,” said McDermott, credited by his coach for a rigorous off-season training regimen. “We had a few jitters in the first half. But once we got over that, we played pretty well.”

Five of Xavier's six field goals in the first half were 3-pointers, but Kennedy led 22-19 at intermission. The Cougars were still ahead by a point going into the last stanza, but the Saints outscored them down the stretch 23-15.

Trailing 47-42 with 2:46 remaining, Xavier finished off with a 12-0 run. McDermott accounted for all but one of the last dozen points.

First-year Kennedy Coach Jon McKowen said his inexperienced crew, which lost four of its top five scorers from last season, went all-out all the way.

“We treated this like a real game,” he said, “so our season opener will be like game two.”

His team, too, is feeling the after-effects of football.

“We've got some multi-sport kids who are a little beat up and banged up,” McKowen noted. “So there's still that transition.”

But he felt the exhibition game with regulation rules did wonders for his young team.

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"We learned a lot today," he said. "I was really only looking for two things today: That we play hard and look organized.

"I thought we did both."

Senior swingman John Bardsley led Kennedy with 19 points, including eight out of eight free throws in the second half.

XAVIER (54): Adam McDermott 5 8-9 21, Mitchell Burger 2 2-2 8, Connor Ramlo 0 3-4 3, Calvin Winker 5 3-4 15, Andrew Bisenius 1 0-0 3, Joe Welch 1 0-3 3, Blake Klostermann 0 0-0 0, Blake Whitten 0 0-0 0, Daniel Richardson 0 0-0 0, Noah Clasen 0 1-2 1, John Peters 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 17-24 54.

KENNEDY (47): AJ Carter 1 2-2 4, John Bardsley 5 9-10 19, Cole Murdock 1 2-2 5, Brandon Buck 2 0-0 4, Drew Heitland 3 1-2 7, Zach Daniels 1 2-4 4, JB Bill 0 0-2 0, Bryton Heisler 2 0-0 4, Austin Holzer 0 0-0 0, Famiek Cook 0 0-0 0, Dillon Ross 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 16-22 47.

Halftime - Kennedy 22, Xavier 19. 3-point goals – Xavier 9 (McDermott 3, Burger 2, Winker 2, Welch 1, Bisenius 1), Kennedy 1 (Murdock 1). Total fouls – Xavier 18, Kennedy 23. Fouled out – Bisenius, Daniels.