

The Xavier Saints have had a tough season so far with a 13-22 overall record, but they could be catching fire in time for the Class 4A playoffs that start next week.

Xavier collected 34 hits Tuesday night and hammered Washington, 11-1 and 12-4, in a Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader at the Bob Erusha softball diamond at Xavier.

The Saints lost nine straight games earlier this month, but now they've won six of their last eight and are looking better.

Xavier combined lusty hitting, good pitching and tight defense to roll past the Warriors.

"They're putting it together," said Coach Nikki Gahring. "They're really coming together and things are starting to mesh. There's a whole lot of talk, a whole lot of energy."

The softball must have looked as big as a beachball to the Saints hitters Tuesday night. Olivia Richards was 6-for-6 in the doubleheader, Kailee Becker was 6-for-7 and Katie Langholz went 6-for-8 to lead the onslaught.

Richards and Stephanie Wehr drove in four runs in the doubleheader and Wehr had a game-winning double to end the opener by the mercy rule in the bottom of the sixth inning. Wehr was 4-for-7 overall, Cassie Himmelsbach was 3-for-5 and Jamie Feltes went 3-for-8.

Maria Steffen pitched a complete game in the opener, allowing one run on six hits with seven strikeouts. Ellie Malecek tossed a complete game in the nightcap and was cruising with a 10-1 lead until she was touched for three runs in the fifth, but the outcome was never in doubt.

Payton Bruner went 4-for-4 for Washington in the second game.

Xavier raised its records to 13-22 overall and 9-13 in the conference. Washington fell to 12-19 overall and 8-14 in the league.



Gahring was naturally hoping for a better record this season, but the Saints still have a chance to make a good showing in the Class 4A regional tournament that will begin with a game at Vinton-Shellsburg on Thursday, July 7. The Saints beat Vinton-Shellsburg, 11-0, this past Friday and could face 12th-ranked Pella in the regional semifinals on Saturday, July 9 at Pella.

If the Saints beat Pella, they probably would face second-ranked Carlisle in the regional finals.

Gahring remains optimistic, despite the roller-coaster this season.

"When you're working with female teenagers, sometimes you don't know what you're going to get," she remarked. "Sometimes you get a whole lot of energy and a whole lot of talk and a whole lot of passion. "Softball is a grind," she said. "It's a day-to-day, two-solid-months grind of games every day. That can take a toll out of you. It's a grind and it takes a special athlete." Xavier hosts Kennedy Thursday night. The Cougars are ranked No. 3 in Class 5A.