

Saints headed back to state tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 29 February 2016 22:03 -



IOWA CITY - Ryan Luehrsmann wants to make trips to the boys state basketball tournament a regular habit for the Xavier Saints instead of a sporadic occurrence.

Luehrsmann and the Saints took another big step in building that tradition Monday night.

The eighth-ranked Saints turned in a workmanlike performance and defeated Mount Pleasant, 63-47, in Iowa City to earn their second straight trip to the Class 3A state tournament in Des Moines next week.

"You put two trips together, that's a heck of an accomplishment," said Luehrsmann. "It's not easy to get down there.

"We want to change the mindset, we want to have a culture at Xavier where that's the expectation at the high school level. And the little kids on down in junior high and into the feeder programs coming, that they're used to going and seeing Xavier at state tournaments year-in and year-out."

Xavier (16-8) drew the No. 6 seed and will face No. 3 seed Spirit Lake (21-3) in the opening round on Tuesday, March 8 at 6:35 p.m. at Wells Fargo Arena.

Mitchell Burger was the only returning starter from last year's team, but the peppery guard missed his second straight game Monday while serving what has turned into an indefinite suspension. Burger sat on the bench for Xavier's game against Clear Creek Amana in the regional finals last Thursday night, but he was not on the bench Monday night.

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Burger's status for the state tournament has yet to be determined.



"It's something we're going to have to talk about and think about over the course of the next couple of days," said Luehrsmann. "It's good that we have time to try and figure that out."

"Mitch is a great kid," said Luehrsmann. "He's been a big part of our program. We love the kid. It's just been a real difficult time the last few weeks."

Burger is Xavier's leading scorer at 16.6 points per game. The Saints were good enough to get to state without him, but they might be hard-pressed to succeed in Des Moines without their fiery leader.

"He's a great player," said Matt Mims, who plays alongside Burger in the backcourt. "He's a big part of us. Hopefully we can get him back."

Xavier grabbed a 16-point lead at 41-25 with 4:32 left in the third quarter, but Mount Pleasant refused to fold. The Panthers pulled within nine points at 41-32 with a seven-point spurt and were still dangerously close at 47-37 early in the fourth quarter thanks to a terrific performance by sophomore Brady Sartorius, who finished with 25 points.

Max Techau went to work for the Saints and scored three straight times, including a three-point play that gave Xavier a 54-40 advantage with 4:05 left in the contest. Mims tacked on two free throws with 3:12 left to make it 56-40 and the Saints were out of danger.

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Xavier belted Mount Pleasant, 61-28, in the opening game of the season at Mount Pleasant, but the Panthers were a pesky bunch and Sartorius looked like a future star.

"It's a difficult position to be in when you're heavily favored and you know you're playing a really good team," said Luehrsmann. "We knew we were going to see a different team, but you read it in the paper, you see it on message boards that you're expected to blow somebody out. That's not an easy position to be in.

"We're lucky Sartorius didn't go for 40, because if he had done that we would have been in real trouble."

At it was, Sartorius scored 25 points and his teammates combined for only 22.

Techau led Xavier with 15 points. Ryan Stulken finished with 14 and Jackson Joens had 10. Mims scored eight points, all on free throws. Nolan Butkwoski added seven points and Bryce Schulte had six.

The Saints are looking forward to the trip to Des Moines after finishing third at the state tournament last year.

"It's going to be awesome," said Stulken. "Last year we had Adam (McDermott) and Calvin (Winker) and Mike Mims. We were loaded.

"And this summer we worked really hard. We knew we could get back there. We really jelled as a team and we knew we could make it back."

Techau, a 6-foot-7 junior, transferred to Xavier from Kennedy and became a big piece of the puzzle. Now he's headed to Des Moines and Wells Fargo Arena with his new buddies.

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"It feels pretty good," he said. "This has been a dream of mine since I was really little, to be a big part of a team that's going to state, so it feels good.

"It should be a great atmosphere," he said. "Hopefully we can go far and do well."

The other first-round pairings at the state tournament are Chariton (23-1) against Solon (10-14), MOC-Floyd Valley (21-3) against Dubuque Wahlert (19-5), and Pella (22-1) against Perry (15-9). The Saints are in the same bracket with Pella and Perry and would play in the semifinals next Thursday if they prevail in the opening round.

Chariton is the No. 1 seed.

MOUNT PLEASANT (47): Bloom 0 0-0 0, Mulford 1 2-2 5, Canby 2 0-0 4, Sartorius 10 3-3 25, Magnani 2 3-4 7, Ita 0 0-0 0, Kohorst 2 2-3 6. Totals 17 10-12 47.

XAVIER (63): Mims 0 8-8 8, Butkowski 2 2-3 7, Whitten 1 0-0 3, Joens 3 2-3 10, Stulken 6 2-2 14, B.Schulte 3 0-0 6, Techau 7 1-1 15. Totals 22 15-17 63.

Halftime - Xavier 34, Mount Pleasant 23. 3-point goals - Mount Pleasant 3 (Sartorius 2, Mulford 1), Xavier 4 (Joens 2, Butkowski 1, Whitten 1).