

Johnson sparks No. 10 Saints by City High

Written by Jim Ecker

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Max Johnson checked out of Friday's game against Iowa City High with a little more than two minutes remaining and got an affectionate head rub from Xavier Coach Ryan Luehrsmann.

Luehrsmann and the Saints have been looking for a spark off the bench all season and the 6-foot-3, 230-pound senior delivered with the best game of his career.

Johnson scored 12 points and snared seven rebounds as the Class 3A 10th-ranked Saints defeated Iowa City High, 57-41, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Ron Thillen Gymnasium.

Johnson had scored 12 points all season before matching it in a single night against the Little Hawks.

"I just want to be someone who can come in and give the team a lot of energy and make the hustle plays and keep things going, not be a hindrance," he said.

Johnson was a deep reserve for the Saints when they won the Class 3A state title last season. He's moved up this year and could be a key guy off the bench as the Saints (3-6) look to get on a roll after a rough start to the campaign.

"I'm really proud of Max Johnson," said Luehrsmann. "He gave us great minutes off the bench

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and great energy.

"I told the guys, we need contributions like that off of our bench if we're going to be a viable threat here the rest of the way."

Johnson answered the call each time he got a chance, scoring six points in both halves and giving Xavier's other big guys a rest. He always seemed to be in the right place at the right time.

"He's a very cerebral kid," said Luehrsmann. "He's a really good athlete, he moves really well for his size.

"Max is an animal. He wants to get every rebound. He did a heck of a job tonight. He gave us just what he needs to give us off the bench. Great energy and toughness."

Johnson was a top lineman on the Xavier football team that reached the semifinals of the state playoffs and finished with an 11-1 record. He'd like to play football in college and has visits lined up, but has not made a decision.

Xavier raced to a 33-17 lead at halftime, but the Little Hawks (2-10) came alive in the third quarter and pulled within six points at 38-32 to make a game of it.

The Saints quickly responded, however. Matt Mims popped in a 3-pointer and Max Butkowski contributed a three-point play with a feed from Johnson to make it 44-32 and lift the home team out of danger.

"I feel like we are getting better," said Luehrsmann. "We've played really well in stretches and then we'll fall back into our bad habits.

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"Hopefully tonight, this is our chance to break through that routine that hasn't been good."

Xavier opened a 20-point lead at 57-37 before settling for the 16-point victory.

Mims led Xavier with 15 points, eight rebounds and four assists. Butkowski finished with 13 points and Jackson Joens had 10, all in the first half.

Antonio Turner led Iowa City High with 17 points.

IOWA CITY HIGH (41): Turner 5 4-5 17, Clayton 0 1-2 1, McIntire 0 2-2 2, Christian 2 0-0 4, Threlkeld-Wiegand 3 0-0 8, Craig 2 0-0 4, Johnson 1 0-0 2, Kambomba 1 1-2 3, Robinson 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 8-13 41.

XAVIER (57): Ropp 0 0-0 0, Lux 1 0-2 3, Mims 4 6-10 15, Scott 0 0-0 0, Butkowski 5 2-3 13, Joens 4 0-0 10, Demplewolf 0 0-0 0, Q.Schulte 0 1-2 1, Moeder 0 0-0 0, Techau 1 1-2 3, Johnson 4 4-4 12, B.Schulte 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 14-22 57.

Halftime - Xavier 33, Iowa City High 17. 3-point goals - Iowa City High 5 (Turner 3, Threlkeld-Wiegand 2), Xavier 5 (Joens 2, Lux 1, Mims 1, Butkowski 1).