

Saints push No.1 Trojans without Joens

Written by Jim Ecker

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IOWA CITY - The Xavier Saints gave the top-ranked team in Class 4A a good battle Thursday night without one of their top players.

Now the Saints will try to rise to the top in Class 3A for the second straight year when the postseason tournament begins Monday.

Xavier took a 33-32 lead over Iowa City West midway through the third quarter Thursday, but the game slipped away and the Saints lost 58-46 in the final game of the regular season.

The Saints played without Jackson Joens, a talented junior who banged his head against Dubuque Wahlert Tuesday night. He thought he'd be OK for the game against Iowa City West, but had more concussion-type symptoms Thursday and was withheld.

Joens is questionable for Monday's game against DeWitt Central in the opening round of the Class 3A district tournament.

"It's looking like he probably won't be there," said Coach Ryan Luehrsmann. "And he may not be there the next game if we're lucky enough to get there."

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The Iowa High School Athletic Association has been stressing proper concussion protocol to all the schools this year.

"It's the right thing," said Luehrsmann. "You have to protect the kids and their health, first and foremost."

Joens appeared to be in good spirits at the game Thursday, but was not sure if he'd be in uniform for the district opener Monday. "I don't know yet," he remarked.

This is nothing new for the Saints, of course. Mitchell Burger, one of their top players last year, missed two games in the 2016 district tournament before returning for the run to the Class 3A state title.

The Saints (10-11) gave Iowa City West (18-2) a good game for much of the night with a slower tempo and tight defense, but the Trojans had too many weapons in the final analysis.

Connor McCaffery scored 19 points for Iowa City West and his younger brother Patrick netted 13 as Iowa Coach Fran McCaffery's sons combined for 32 of their team's points.

Max Techau scored 19 points and grabbed nine rebounds for Xavier. Matt Mims had 13 points and seven assists.

"Max had a great effort tonight," said Luehrsmann. "Really battled hard in there. Took his time with his moves and stepped out and hit some jump shots, which was nice to see. And he competed like crazy on the boards, like he always does."

Mims pulled Xavier within 43-38 at the start of the fourth quarter, but the Trojans went on a 10-1 run to grab control at 53-39.

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Luehrsmann and senior Bryce Schulte were called for technical fouls in the game, apparently for making mild comments that were heard by the officials. In any case, the Saints felt like the game was a good test heading into the postseason.

Iowa City West was averaging 75 points before being held to just 58.

"I thought our effort was great," said Techau. "That might have been one of our best efforts all year, as far as elevating our game based on who we're playing. It was really great to come in and play them tough like that."

Just like last year, the Saints will need a six-game winning streak in the postseason tournaments to claim their second state title in a row.

"We're confident," said Techau. "We're not going to take anything for granted. If we keep playing hard, anything is possible."

The Saints are the No. 3 seed in their substate. Mount Vernon is the No. 2 seed and Davenport Assumption is the No. 1 seed.

"Hopefully we can make a little run," said Luehrsmann. "I like being the underdog."

Xavier's game against DeWitt Central Monday is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. at Mount Vernon High School.

XAVIER (46): Q.Schulte 0 0-0 0, Mims 3 6-7 13, B.Schulte 1 2-2 4, Butkowski 3 0-0 8, Techau 8 3-5 19, Lux 0 0-0 0, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Dempewolf 0 0-0 0, Ropp 0 0-0 0, Bartels 0 0-0 0, Scott 1 0-0 2, Van Berkum 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 11-14 46.

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IOWA CITY WEST (58): Lane 4 3-5 11, Disterhoft 1 0-0 2, P. McCaffery 6 1-2 13, C. McCaffery 5 7-8 19, Ono-Fullard 0 0-0 0, Flitz 1 0-0 3, Odunsi 3 2-2 8, Sims 1 0-1 2, Van Roekel 0 0-0 0, Nasr 0 0-0 0, Hillberry 0 0-0 0, Henstrom 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 13-17 58.

Halftime - Iowa City West 30, Xavier 26. 3-point goals - Xavier 3 (Butkowski 2, Mims 1), Iowa City West 3 (C.McCaffery 2, Flitz 1).