

Ryan "Louie" Luehrsmann had an audacious goal when he became the Xavier boys basketball coach five years ago.

He announced in 2012 that he wanted to see the Saints become a powerhouse in Class 3A basketball and make regular trips to the state tournament in Des Moines.

Mission accomplished.

The Saints earned a spot in the state tournament for the third straight year Monday night with a convincing 58-39 victory over Dubuque Wahlert in the Class 3A substate finals at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Xavier finished third at the state tournament in 2015 and claimed the 3A state title last year by beating Wahlert in the championship game. Now they're headed back to Des Moines next week for more.

"To do this three years in a row, it's a great accomplishment for our program," said Luehrsman. "We want to be the Cedar Rapids team that's a constant fixture that's down there regularly, and right now we're turning in the right direction.

"I'm really happy for this group," he said. "We fought through some challenges early in the year,

but we stuck together and continued to believe."

The Saints were a dismal 4-9 in late January, but they caught fire and have won 9 of their last 11 games.

Xavier (13-11) has been impressive in the postseason tournament with a 40-point victory over DeWitt Central, an eight-point conquest of seventh-ranked Mount Vernon and the 19-point victory over Wahlert.

"We never stopped believing," said 6-foot-7 senior Max Techau, who finished with 16 points, 10 rebounds and a big dunk against Wahlert. "I trusted these guys and I trusted myself. I knew we were able to bounce back and make a run like this once more."

The Saints led 38-29 entering the fourth quarter and blew the Golden Eagles away in the final stanza. The Saints clamped down on Wahlert's 3-point shooters in the second half and relied on Matt Mims to run their efficient offense.

The Saints made 21 of 35 shots for 60 percent with Mims finding the right guys at the right time.

"He just took over, did a great job facilitating, beat his guy off the dribble, made passes to his teammates and was key," said Luehrsmann.

Mims, already the school's career assist leader as a junior, finished with 16 points and five assists.

"I've always believed in this team," Mims said. "I knew we were special. We have a lot of great guys on our team and I just knew it was a matter of time until we started clicking and we finally did."

Monday's game was similar to last Thursday's victory over Mount Vernon in the district finals. The Saints got off to a fairly slow start and missed some open shots, but Jackson Jones connected for two straight 3-pointers to loosen things up and the Saints were off and rolling.

Joens, who missed two games earlier this month with a concussion, joined Techau and Mims with 16 points as the trio accounted for 48 of Xavier's 58 markers. Joens tossed in four 3-pointers.

Xavier owned a 12-point lead midway through the fourth period before putting the game away. Techau made two free throws after struggling at the line most of the game to make it 46-32, then Techau scored with a putback to make it 48-32 with 3:40 left.

Nolan Butkowski, who finished with five points, scored to make it 50-32 with 3:20 remaining and the rest was academic.



Sophomore Quinn Schulte contributed six assists, four rebounds, three steals, two points and more good defense.

The pairings for the Class 3A state tournament will be announced on Wednesday. It will be crowded at the top with No. 1 Waverly-Shell Rock (22-1), No. 2 West Delaware (24-0), No. 3 Pella (22-2) and No. 4 Mount Pleasant (22-2) all headed to Des Moines.

The field also includes 10th-ranked Dallas Center-Grimes (15-9), Sergeant Bluff-Luton (15-9),

Atlantic (19-5) and the Saints (13-11).

Xavier has the worst record in the Class 3A tournament, but the Saints have faced the stiffest competition in the Mississippi Valley Conference and do not mind being the underdog.

"We embrace it," said Techau. "We love it."

"This season was up and down," he said, "but we never gave up on each other, we kept believing in each other, we kept playing hard. We're right back where we want to be."

The Class 3A state tournament will begin next Tuesday, March 7 with the quarterfinals at 2 p.m., 3:45, 6:35 and 8:15. The semifinals are scheduled for Thursday, March 9 and the finals are set for Saturday, March 11.

"It's going to be a lot of fun, just like last year," said Mims. "I'm just really excited to get it going again.

"It's going to be a lot of fun and I'm ready."

Austin Savary scored 14 points for Wahlert (7-16). Peter Timmerman had 10 points for the Golden Eagles. Alex Timp, who had played in only seven games all year due to a knee injury, returned for Monday's game and gave Wahlert a courageous spark with his hustle.

WAHLERT (39): Bandy 1 2-2 4, Timp 1 1-2 3, Bohr 0 0-0 0, Collins 1 0-0 3, Savary 4 5-6 14, Leytem 1 1-1 3, Jaeger 1 0-0 2, Herrig 0 0-0 0, Timmerman 2 5-8 10, Gruhl 0 0-0 0. Totals 11 14-19 39.

XAVIER (58): Keating 0 0-0 0, Ropp 0 0-0 0, Lux 0 0-0 0, Mims 4 8-11 16, Scott 0 0-0 0,

Butkowski 2 0-0 5, Joens 6 4-6 16, Demplewolf 1 0-0 3, Q.Schulte 1 0-2 2, Techau 6 4-8 16, Johnson 0 0-0 0, B.Schulte 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 12-21 58.

Halftime - Xavier 28, Wahlert 22. 3-point goals - Wahlert 3 (Collins 1, Savary 1, Timmerman 1), Xavier 6 (Joens 4, Butkowski 1, Demplewolf 1).