

Barish, Miller anchor Xavier D-Line

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 15 September 2016 04:52 - Last Updated Friday, 16 September 2016 06:34



It's always nice when the opposing coach has something good to say about your players before a big game.

That's what happened this past Friday night when Benton Community football coach Kal Goodchild told Xavier Coach Duane Schulte that he was really impressed with defensive tackles Zach Barish and Lucas Miller from watching them on tape.

"He mentioned how impressive he was with these two guys," Schulte related, "and hopefully rightfully so."

Barish, who stands 6-foot-3 and 250 pounds, and Miller, who measures 5-11 and 225, are both seniors and two-year starters for the Saints. They give Xavier a physical presence in the middle of the defensive line, a key ingredient for any successful team.

"They're an integral part of what we do," said Schulte, whose Saints are ranked No. 1 in Class 3A heading into Friday night's home game with Charles City. "They're hard-nosed, bulldog-type kids that have a lot of grit to them. They try to get after it and play good, solid old-fashioned football."

Interior defensive linemen usually go unnoticed by fans, but rival coaches spend a lot of time analyzing an opponent and Goodchild obviously liked what he saw on tape. He probably was just as impressed with them in Xavier's 47-14 victory over the Bobcats in Van Horne.

The players like to be noticed, but don't let it go to their heads.

Barish, Miller anchor Xavier D-Line

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 15 September 2016 04:52 - Last Updated Friday, 16 September 2016 06:34

"I appreciate all the comments we got from him," said Barish. "It gives us a little bit of confidence."



"It's always a good compliment," Miller agreed. "But it's not just us. It's everybody around us who's trying to do their job. We're just trying to get done what we can in the middle so people around us can do their job."

Barish and Miller spend a lot of time with Coach Schulte during the day. In addition to their daily two-hour practices, both players are in his law class at Xavier and both are in his economics class.

Schulte on the football field apparently is just like Schulte in the classroom: Low key, matter-of-fact, pay attention to details and focus on what's important.

"Not much of a difference," Barish observed. "You pay attention, you say 'Yes, Coach' and 'No, Coach' and you'll be doing fine."

Barish and Miller both love playing football and would like to play in college if they can. And they both are thinking about law school some day and a possible legal career, so they must like what

they're learning in Schulte's classes.

"They're great guys to have in class," said Schulte. "Always engaged, just like on the football field. They're fun to teach."

Barish and Miller both spent a heavy amount of time in the Xavier weight room during the off-season, working to get bigger and stronger for their final year with the Saints.

"It all starts in there and it all finishes in there," said Barish. "You have to love the weight room. It's where you get better.

"If you don't go in the weight room, you don't get better. The only way to get better is to lift weights, run and do other stuff."

Miller also enjoys pumping iron.

"I spent a lot of time in the weight room over the winter and summer and spring," he said. "I've definitely gained some strength over the winter. It was a big winter for me."

Miller tries to use his strength in the middle of the defensive line, where it can get rough and a little nasty at times.

"I enjoy being down there, kind of in the trenches," he said. "You're always going up against great guys.

"You're just coming off as hard as you can, and you know they're coming off as hard as they can. You just have to fight it. It's a fun experience."

Barish has collected seven solo tackles and 4 1/2 assists this season for 11 1/2 tackles on a balanced defensive unit. Miller has seven solo stops and one assist for eight total tackles.

It's hard for anyone to collect gaudy stats on the Xavier football team on a consistent basis, especially if the Saints are headed for a comfortable victory. Last week against Benton Community, star tailback Maliki Wilson carried the ball only five times for 61 yards and quarterback Bryce Schulte attempted only seven passes.

The Saints were far ahead of the Bobcats in the third quarter and Coach Schulte began emptying his bench, giving everyone a chance to play. That meant Barish and Miller were not going to get any more tackles, and it also meant Wilson and Bryce Schulte would not be adding to their totals.

Coach Schulte knows that spreading the wealth might bite the Saints when it comes to picking all-state teams, because many of those all-star squads are influenced by statistics, but he feels an obligation to play his reserves, develop depth, keep the starters healthy and take it relatively easy on an opponent once the game has already been decided.

"It's a big juggling act," he said. "We talked about it in our staff meeting Sunday morning, about getting those guys (the starters) reps so they can practice their craft.

"You want to do it in game situations, but you don't want to come out looking like a buffoon to the opponents or to other people and look like you're laying it on. So it's a tough balancing act, to be honest with you.

"Maybe in the end it hurts our guys for all-state stuff, but I guess that's just the way it is."

Wilson has carried the ball 46 times for 615 yards in three games. That's an average of 205 yards per game and 13.4 yards per carry, and he's scored nine touchdowns this year (eight rushing, one receiving).

Barish, Miller anchor Xavier D-Line

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 15 September 2016 04:52 - Last Updated Friday, 16 September 2016 06:34

Bryce Schulte has completed 21 of 36 passes for 255 yards, with two TD passes and one interception. He's hitting 58.3 percent of his throws.

Xavier is 3-0 overall and 1-0 in the district. Charles City is 1-2 overall and 1-0 in the district.