

Rocca helps Saints rock 3A foes

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 29 September 2016 04:25 -



The last thing Xavier Coach Duane Schulte told his players following their victory at Decorah last Friday was to make sure they volunteered as sand-baggers over the weekend to help fight the flood back home.

Linebacker John Rocca and the rest of the Saints took it seriously.

Rocca helped with the sand-bagging efforts at one of his coach's apartment complex, then he helped a teammate's family that lives in the affected area, then he went out to Palo to help there.

"I'd say the majority of us were downtown helping out," he said Tuesday. "We were all spread out."

Rocca lives in Marion, well out of harm's way, but said all of the Saints wanted to pitch in. "We're all together as a community," he remarked.

The Saints are a tight-knit group, on the field and off, and it's one of the reasons they are enjoying another fine season this year.

Xavier has a 5-0 record and is ranked No. 1 in Class 3A heading into Friday night's homecoming game against Independence, which has an 0-5 record and has scored only one touchdown all year.

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The Saints are 3-0 in district games, outscoring their district opponents 120-27 in three blowout victories. South Tama, Waverly-Shell Rock, Charles City and Benton Community are all tied for second place in the district at 2-1. Only the top two teams from the district are assured of making the playoffs.

Rocca, a 6-foot-3, 190-pound linebacker, has been one of the anchors of Xavier's defense this season. Rocca and Jack Lemke are tied for the team lead with 23 tackles, and Rocca leads the Saints with four sacks and eight tackles for loss.

Rocca's last name is pronounced ROCK-a, which is a good name for a linebacker who can Rock-em and Sock-em on a football field, usually in the right place at the right time to make a tackle.

"First of all, he's smart," said Coach Schulte. "Second of all, he's willing to listen to his coaches. And he's got the physical tools. He's pretty athletic and can move."

Rocca does not plan to play football in college, but he's thinking about the possibility of running track at St. Ambrose University in Davenport with an emphasis on the 400 dash and 400 hurdles.

His main concern right now, of course, is helping the Saints win more football games and get as far as they can in the playoffs. The Saints had two impressive goal-line stands in their 38-6 victory at Decorah last week, complementing an offense that had five long touchdown drives of 70 yards or more.

Rocca had his nose in the middle of those goal-line stands, along with his buddies on defense.

"We did well and it certainly helps our confidence going into the bigger games, knowing that we've done this a few times," he remarked. "Everyone has been doing their job, working as a team."

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Xavier tailback Maliki Wilson has rushed for 959 yards and 11 touchdowns this season in five games. He's also caught a touchdown pass and scored on a pair of 2-point conversions for 76 points this season. He's now rushed for 2,232 yards and scored 26 touchdowns in his career.