

Saints aiming for lucky 7th soccer title

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 05 June 2012 00:09 -

The Xavier girls soccer team began its remarkable string of six state titles in a row in 2006 when Kayla Armstrong was in the fifth grade.

They don't see any reason to stop now.

Armstrong scored two goals Monday as the top-ranked Saints blanked Prairie, 4-0, in the Class 2A regional finals at Xavier to claim yet another berth at state.

Xavier (15-2) will face 10th-ranked ADM/Van Meter in the quarterfinals of the state tournament Thursday at 2:45 p.m. on Field 6 at the Muscatine Soccer Complex.

Armstrong was a fifth grader in the Linn-Mar school system when Xavier High School began its streak. She was a young girl at the time, but followed soccer closely and knew all about the Saints and their impressive record of success.

"I was always aware," she said. "I always watched soccer, so it made me want to come here just to be part of the legacy."

Xavier won state titles in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. They'll go for their seventh straight this week, and needless to say, the Saints (15-2) are not merely happy to be making the trip.

"No, we want it all," said Armstrong, a junior. "That's the goal."

Armstrong, blessed with great speed and quickness, ranks among the state leaders with 29 goals in 17 games.

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"She is a very gifted player," said Xavier Coach Doug Graham. "She's quick, she's fast, has great vision, knows how to manipulate and move around. And she is really pretty fast."

Armstrong appears fast enough to be a top sprinter for the Xavier track team, but she plays basketball and then gets ready for soccer. Track doesn't fit into her schedule.

"This is a big commitment to Xavier soccer, so I don't have time," she said.

Armstrong gave the Saints a 3-0 lead with a shot into the right corner with 8:27 left in the game on an assist from Monica Busse, then finished the scoring with 2:30 remaining after a shot by Lauren Konchar banged off the crossbar.

The victory was fairly well assured for the Saints before Armstrong collected her two goals.

Senior Annie Dale pointed Xavier in the right direction when she scored an unassisted goal with less than two minutes gone in the game. Busse made it 2-0 with 20:06 left in the first half with an assist from Marissa Berutti.

Sara Chicchelly had a fairly easy day in goal for the Saints and had to make only four saves. Freshman Hannah Kousheh had two scoring chances for Prairie (13-6) on breakaways in the second half, but could not connect.

Xavier is returning to the state tournament with a big target on its back, but Graham will continue to preach his same mantra about effort and attitude.

"We work to give 100 percent of those two things every game, and hopefully the results will come with that," he said. "Winning is always a bonus to the work ethic, to the attitude and to working as a team. Today was a very nice game."

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Monday's game featured two "flip throws" by Xavier sophomore Holly Hazelton, a former gymnast who did a complete 360-degree flip before throwing the ball a long distance on in-bounds plays. The remarkable maneuver led to a pair of goals.

"In my very best state, when I was a young man, I could throw a ball a long way," said Graham. "It was only about half of what Holly can throw it. She does a great flip."

Graham called her Holly "Flip Throw" Hazelton.

"I taught it to myself a year ago," said Hazelton, who has used the maneuver only a few times in games. "I kind of wanted it to be a surprise for Prairie."