

Xavier girls pin 1st goal, loss on Lions

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Neither wind nor rain nor bitter cold could keep two of the best of the state's girls soccer teams from their appointed round ball matchup Thursday night.

As it turned out, the game was won after it barely started when Xavier all-stater Kayla Armstrong scored on a rocket kick at the 38:03 mark of the first to give her team a 1-0 lead.

For the next 78 minutes, the Saints and the visiting Lions of Linn-Mar battled back and forth to a standstill.

"It was basically like a boxing match," said Linn-Mar Coach Steve Dickinson, whose previously undefeated and unscored upon squad on Thursday climbed from three to two in Class 3A poll.

"One team would get on a roll and make some threats. Then the other team would respond and make a comeback of their own.

"This was a great match between two very strong teams."

Xavier (8-1) is top ranked in Class 2A and the defending state champion.

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Assistant Coach Rocki Shepard said the Saints had all they could handle against the Lions.



“Linn-Mar has a great team,” she shivered afterward.”The girls all like each other, and we love playing them.

“Last year we beat them with a goal in the last five seconds. This time it came down to a missed goal in the last eight seconds.”

With time running down, the Lions (6-1) unleashed a flurry of attacks over the final few minutes of play.

The last gasp came on a picture-perfect header by freshman Claire Larson that grazed the crossbar at the top of the net and bounced away.

Game over.

Armstrong, who rival coach Dickinson calls the best soccer player in Iowa, took seven of Xavier’s 14 shots, but only two of them were on the goal.

The first one and the one that counted came when fellow senior Monica Busse split two defenders and dropped the ball Armstrong’s way. She sailed it past Lion goal keep Rylie Frese, who never had a chance.

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“We came out unprepared for Kayla’s speed,” Dickinson explained.

It was the first goal Frese had allowed all year, and she stopped the only other one that came at her on Thursday.

For her part, Armstrong said the fast start was in the cards.

“We wanted to get a quick one and hold them off on defense,” she said.

She knew her team dodged a bullet, though.

Despite the back-and-forth flow of the game, Linn-Mar was the more aggressive outfit. The Lions took more than twice as many shots (31), and 14 of them were keepers that Saints goalie Sarah Chicchelly saved from going in.

“Sarah played a great game, especially with all those stops in the last five minutes,” Armstrong said.

Both teams did themselves proud, according to Shepard.

“The kids played with a lot of heart,” she said. “This was just super high, amazing soccer.”