

Armstrong's hat trick puts Saints in final

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 07 June 2013 19:46 - Last Updated Friday, 07 June 2013 20:48



DES MOINES - The Xavier Saints needed something spectacular from Kayla Armstrong Friday after they got off to another relatively slow start at the state soccer tournament.

The Super Saint delivered in style.

Armstrong poured in three goals as the top-ranked Saints dumped No.4 Pella, 4-0, in the semifinals of the Class 2A state tournament at the Cownie Sports Park.

Xavier (18-1) will be chasing an unprecedented eighth consecutive title when it faces No.3 Sioux City East (18-2) in the championship game Saturday at 1:30 p.m. on Field 9.

Pella was making life difficult for the Saints in the first half when Armstrong streaked down the left side with the ball, weaved through three defenders and scored for a 1-0 lead.

Armstrong used something new on her first goal to mesmerize the Lady Dutch.

"You definitely use the strengths of your game," she said. "I kind of did a hip-thing. They hadn't see it yet, but I pulled that out early."

Armstrong's unassisted goal with 18:06 left in the first half broke the ice and may have broken Pella's spirits.

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Sammi Shepard made it 2-0 with a blast from the left side with an assist from Armstrong with 7:17 left in the first half, and Armstrong made it 3-0 with another goal with just 30 seconds remaining in the half.

The Saints appeared a little tight at the beginning of the game, but they were laughing and joking at halftime with their three-goal lead and a trip to the finals in sight.

Armstrong scored early in the second half to make it 4-0 with an assist from Katie Ives, giving Armstrong 43 goals in 19 games this season.

Coach Bailey Dorrington began yanking her starters in favor of reserves, saving as much energy for Saturday's finals as possible. Armstrong took a seat with 36 minutes, 45 seconds left in the game and was not needed the rest of the day.

Armstrong, Shepard, Lizzy McWhinney and Lucy Martin are seniors and four-year starters who will be seeking their fourth state titles on Saturday. Armstrong thinks she'll be able to get a good night's sleep and not worry too much about her final game in a Xavier High School uniform.

She'll try to stay as relaxed as possible.

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"That was my trouble yesterday, I think," she said, referring to a so-so game in the opening round against ADM. "I definitely thought about that game a lot more. It's easier if you're more easy-going and know you're out there to have fun.

"I was definitely more free-spirited today, going with the flow and not letting anything get in my head. And my teammates were there to play me the ball and be a big part of it."

Sarah Chicchelly made several diving saves in goal for the Saints and kept Pella off the board.



Xavier boasts an 11-0 record in the state tournament with this senior class. One more victory will give them four rings for their fingers as they leave high school.

Shepard has cherished her four years in a Saints uniform.

"It's meant a lot," she said. "It's really different from club soccer. Our team chemistry is amazing this year. That's really helped. It's a perfect year to go out on. We all get along."

Armstrong will continue her soccer career at Drake University next year, but Shepard will be hanging up her cleats. She plans to attend the University of Iowa and major in sociology, so this is it. One more game for the title, one more game in her career.

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"It's going to be really weird. I'll probably cry," said Shepard. "It will be my last game with these girls."

Dorrington, 24, will be seeking her fifth title with the Xavier soccer program. She helped the Saints win titles in 2004, 2006 and 2007 as a star player and served as an assistant coach last year.

Dorrington was a high school junior when Xavier began its streak of seven straight titles in 2006. The Saints are the only team in IGHS AU history to win seven consecutive titles, in any sport.

If they win No.8 on Saturday, they'll extend their own state record and make it even harder for someone to catch them some day.

Armstrong said it's been an honor to be part of the Xavier program.

"To come out and win and have the 'X' on your jersey, you don't realize it until you're almost at the end," she said. "It's something I'll really miss."

Shepard thinks she'll be able to get a good night's rest Friday night, despite the big task on Saturday. After all, she's been through it three times before.

"Usually I can get knocked out pretty good," she said. "It's usually right before the game when you get a lot of butterflies. You're kind of shaking until you get that first goal and you can take a deep breath."

Dorrington remembers some restless nights when she played for the Saints in state tournaments.

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"You're really excited, but eventually you pass out," she said. "A lot of times you're tired from the other games. You start flashing plays and flashing games, so it will be tough for the girls tonight in the hotel."

Dorrington coached a good portion of Friday's game from a precarious spot along the sideline. She put a water cooler on top of the Xavier bench and sat on top of the cooler for a better view of the field. That was fine until she turned to ask a passerby a question in the second half and the cooler began to topple over.

Dorrington managed to jump off the cooler and land on her feet, laughing along with her players who witnessed the acrobatic feat.

"I bailed, because I knew it was going," she said later, "so I just jumped."

STATE GIRLS SOCCER TOURNAMENT At Des Moines

Friday

CLASS 3A
Semifinals
WDM Dowling 2, Iowa City West 0
Ankeny 2, Waukee 1

CLASS 2A
Semifinals
SC East 2, Pleasant Valley 1
CR Xavier 4, Pella 0

CLASS 1A

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Semifinals

SC Heelan 2, Center Point-Urbana 1

Davenport Assumption 4, Nevada 2

Saturday

CLASS 3A

Championship

WDM Dowling (18-2) vs. Ankeny (21-0), 4 pm

CLASS 2A

Championship

CR Xavier (18-1) vs. SC East (18-2), 1:30 pm

CLASS 1A

Championship

SC Heelan (17-0) vs. Davenport Assumption (18-1), 11 am