

No.1 Wahlert holds off Saints, 70-62

Written by Jim Ecker

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EPWORTH - Adam McDermott and Calvin Winker will play on separate AAU basketball teams this spring and summer, but they'll be working for the same goal when they join forces at Xavier High School again next season as seniors.

They want one more victory to reach the big stage at the state tournament in Des Moines.

The Saints overcame a 14-point deficit and gave top-ranked Dubuque Wahlert a big scare Monday night in the Class 3A substate finals, but the Golden Eagles kept their cool and claimed a 70-62 victory before a packed house in Epworth.

McDermott gave Xavier a 52-51 lead with a steal and layup with 5:35 left in the game, but Jared Walker responded with a 3-pointer for Wahlert to get his team headed in the right direction again with a 54-52 edge.

"If he doesn't make that shot, we get a rebound and come down and score it might have been a different game," mused Saints Coach Ryan Luehrsmann. "That was probably the turning point of the game."

Winker tied the game at 54-54 with 4:45 left, but Wahlert scored six straight points and maintained the lead for good.

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McDermott and Winker, a pair of talented juniors, scored 21 points apiece for the Saints, who finished with a 15-9 record. They both played for the varsity last year as sophomores when the Saints went 11-12, so this was a step in the right direction.

"I'm disappointed with the loss, but happy to see what we can do next year," said McDermott. "We'll be ready."

McDermott and Winker are looking forward to a steady diet of AAU basketball, summer camps and extended time in the weight room as they plan for the 2014-15 campaign.

"I know Adam and Calvin, with the success they've had, they'll step up and be leaders for us," said Luehrsmann. "I think this game will really help them to grow heading into the spring and their AAU season."



"I know both of them not only want to have outstanding high school careers overall and finish it right next year as seniors and try to find a way to get to Des Moines, but they want to play basketball after high school. I know that's a huge motivator for them."

"Those are the type of kids and type of mentality we want to have in the program as we try to change the culture," said Luehrsmann.

Wahlert (20-4) shot better than 70 percent in the first half and threatened to blow the Saints out

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of the gym when the score reached 38-24 late in the second quarter, but McDermott nailed a 3-pointer to pull Xavier within 38-27 at intermission.

"I was just pleased we were able to weather the storm there," said Luehrsmann.

The Saints played much better on defense in the second half and drew within 43-42 on a 3-pointer by Andrew Bisenius. McDermott tied the game 45-45 with three free throws and Winker tied it again 47-47 with two charity shots.

And when McDermott gave his club a 52-51 lead, anything seemed possible.

"Our confidence is always up," said Winker. "We always thought we had a chance to win. No matter what the score was, we always thought we had a chance."

Wahlert had a little too much talent, too much size, too much depth for the Saints to handle. Walker scored 21 points, Nolan Timp 18 and Tyler Potts 12 for the winners.

"They kept it rolling. We didn't," said McDermott. "That's what got us down.

"At times it seemed like we messed up and let them get some offensive rebounds. That's what killed us."

Big Matt Nelson, who will play football at Iowa next year, played some of his best basketball in the second half for Xavier, blocking shots and scoring around the basket despite playing with foul problems. In the end, though, Wahlert was too tough to handle.

"Things just didn't go our way," said McDermott. "They're a great team. I wish the best of luck to them."

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Wahlert will face Chariton in the opening round of the Class 3A state tournament next Tuesday. The other first-round games are Harlan vs. Humboldt, Waverly-Shell Rock vs. Grinnell and DeWitt Clinton vs. MOC-Floyd Valley.

XAVIER (62): McDermott 6 6-9 21, Winker 7 3-4 21, Nelson 4 1-2 9, Bisenius 2 0-0 5, Burger 0 4-6 4, Ramlo 1 0-0 2, Hill 0 0-0 0, Welch 0 0-0 0. Totals 20 13-21 62.

WAHLERT (70): Timp 6 6-7 18, Potts 4 1-2 12, Adams 4 1-1 9, Walker 7 4-9 21, Carter 2 2-4 7, Pemsl 1 1-4 3, Lattner 0 0-0 0, Hoffmann 0 0-0 0. Totals 24 16-27 70.

Halftime - Wahlert 38, Xavier 27. 3-point goals - Xavier 8 (Winker 4, McDermott 3, Bisenius 1), Wahlert 6 Potts 3, Walker 3). Fouled out - Bisenius, Nelson.