

Saints dig deep for trip to UNI-Dome

Written by Mike Condon

Saturday, 08 November 2014 00:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 12 November 2014 12:05



The condensed playoff schedule had taken its toll on Xavier physically, with three games in 11 days on the calendar.

Mentally, the Saints were strong but there wasn't much left in their bodies as they battled West Delaware in a Class 3A quarterfinal Friday night at Saints Field.

With its starting backfield of Jay Kortemeyer and Nic Eklund out with injuries, Xavier turned to some lesser-known players to build a 17-0 lead and held off a determined charge from the visiting Hawks to win 27-17 before an overflow crowd.

Next up for Xavier (9-3) is a semifinal date on Thursday against top-ranked Pella in the UNI-Dome. The Dutch advanced with a 31-14 win over Washington, Iowa.

West Delaware finishes at 10-2.

All remaining playoff teams were playing their fourth game in a 15-day span and that heavy workload has taken its toll. Besides their two injured captains, Xavier had several other players who played despite being banged up.

West Delaware saw star quarterback Brent Lammers limp off twice after re-injuring an ankle, only to return and lead a third-quarter rally.

For Saints Coach Duane Schulte, it was all about digging deep and coming up with something extra.

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"I mean we lost two of our best football players," he said. "These guys pulled together and battled hard to get a big win against a great team. (West Delaware) is a good football team."

The fourth-ranked Hawks were able to get some big chunks of yardage against the Saints, but were stopped four times by Xavier after driving inside the 20.

"I can't tell you how tough these guys were tonight," Schulte said. "I think these guys were determined to suck it up and win one for (Kortemeyer and Ekland).

"West Delaware had two outstanding skill guys (Lammers and tailback Coy Roussell). They had great games, but we somehow found a way to win."

Finding a way started on the Saints' very first play. After holding the Hawks to open the game, Xavier slipped Matt Downey into the fullback spot on its first play.

He circled out of the backfield and hauled in a beautiful 46-yard scoring pass from sophomore quarterback Bryce Schulte to put the Saints up 7-0.



"We thought we could pass some against them," said Bryce Schulte. "They have a great run defense so we thought we could come out and throw the ball."

West Delaware turned the ball over on downs on its next series. Schulte looked deep again and hit Joe Welch on a 43-yard connection.

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Schulte then scampered 22 yards to the 2 and scored two plays later on a quarterback sneak for a 14-0 advantage.

A Dallas Klein 32-yard field goal with 1:48 left in the half had the Saints up 17-0 at halftime.

A strange turn of events swung the momentum to the Hawks in the third quarter. Xavier held them on downs, forcing a punt.

On the punt, the Saints were penalized for running into the kicker, a 5-yard infraction. West Delaware then elected to go for it on fourth and 4 and proceeded to draw the Saints offsides, allowing them to pick up the first down.

Three plays later, Lammers ran it in from the 10, cutting the gap to 17-7.

Schulte fumbled on the second play after the kickoff. Two plays later, Lammers hit Trent Curley on an 11-yard scoring strike and the Xavier lead was down to 17-14.

"That was my fault on the fumble," Coach Schulte said. "I never should have called that play."

The younger Schulte said he had trust in his teammates that the Saints would be able to weather the storm.

"Our defense really picked us up after that," he said. "The kept them under control the rest of the way."

A short punt and a good return from Downey put the Saints in business at the Hawks' 21. A personal foul moved the ball to the 10 and two plays later Schulte ran it in to give the Saints a 24-14 lead.

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West Delaware kicked a field goal early in the fourth quarter, but turned it over on downs on its next series with 6:51 remaining. With reserve tailback Sean Murphy doing much of the work, Xavier milked 5:18 off the clock, capping the drive with Klein's second field goal, this one from 25 yards out to seal the win.

Murphy, starting for Kortemeyer, ran for a tough 102 yards on 26 carries, many coming on the final drive.

"It was nothing different than our normal offense," Murphy said. "We just kept running the ball and our offensive line blocked extremely well tonight.

"When you are in the moment, all you can do is fight for the win," he added. "We knew what we had to do. Our line really picked it up in that last drive and we just got in there and ran behind them."

The night ended with a Xavier tradition of the seniors taking one final walk as a group from one end of Saints Field to the other.

They may be done at Saints Field, but there is still football to play.

"This is what you play for at this time of the year," Coach Schulte said. "We earned the chance to play in the Dome by beating a very good football team."

XAVIER 27, WEST DELAWARE 17

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First downs 21 12
Rushes-yards 42-176 39-147
Passing yards 172 112
Comp-Att-Int 9-28-0 4-13-0
Fumbles-lost 1-1 1-1
Punts-avg. 3-34.0 5-43.8
Penalties-yards 8-47 7-65

West Delaware 0 0 14 3 - 17
Xavier 14 3 7 3 - 27

XAV - Matt Downey 46 pass from Bryce Schulte (Dallas Klein kick)
XAV - Schulte 1 run (Klein kick)
XAV - FG Klein 32
WD - Brent Lammers 10 run (Alex Reetz kick)
WD - Trent Curley 11 pass from Lammers (Reetz kick)
XAV - Schulte 4 run (Klein kick)
WD - FG Reetz 34
XAV - FG Klein 25

Individual Statistics

Rushing

West Delaware - Coy Roussell 23-138, Brent Lammers 15-39, Max Ridenour 4-minus 1
Xavier - Sean Murphy 26-102, Bryce Schulte 7-25, Nick Stark 3-12, Ryan Williams 1-10, Matt Downey 1-0, Team 1-minus 2

Passing

West Delaware - Brent Lammers 9-28-0-172

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Xavier - Bryce Schulte 4-12-0-112, Sam Tursi 0-1-0-0

Receiving

West Delaware - John Nagel 1-10, Trent Curley 5-127, Austin Bishop 3-35

Xavier - Matt Downey 1-46, Nick Stark 1-7, Joe Welch 1-43, Dylan Eller 1-16