

No. 1 Pella crushes Saints in 3A semis

Written by Jim Ecker

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CEDAR FALLS - The tulips in Pella will never look as pretty to Xavier football fans after what happened to their beat-up team in the UNI-Dome Thursday night.

In fact, the Saints might want to skip the next few tulip festivals in the old Dutch town entirely.

Pella and all-star quarterback Noah Clayberg proved their No. 1 billing in the state was no fluke Thursday by handing the 10th-ranked Saints their worst loss of the season, 27-0, in the semifinals of the Class 3A playoffs.

The Dutch held Xavier to a grand total of 49 yards of offense, including minus-2 yards on the ground and a skimpy 51 yards through the air (nearly all of it on one play in the fourth quarter).

Meanwhile, Clayberg rushed for 117 yards, passed for 112 yards, had a 35-yard punt return and executed a perfect 33-yard pooch punt to the 1-yard line.

"I knew coming in he was athletic," said Xavier Coach Duane Schulte. "He's got a good line in front of him. He did a good job."

Xavier quarterback Bryce Schulte - the coach's son - spent a good part of the night running for his life against the relentless Pella defense. Schulte got sacked a half-dozen times and finished with minus-38 yards in the rushing department.

The contest was basically over by halftime with the formidable Dutch owning a 20-0 lead, with a commanding 205-14 advantage in total offense.

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The Saints lost 11 yards in the third period and entered the fourth stanza with a measley three yards of total offense.

"They're the real deal," said Coach Schulte. "They have big, fast, strong kids. They get off the ball and play good defense. They've got a team. It will be a good championship game."

Pella (13-0) will face Sioux City Heelan (12-1) for the Class 3A title next Thursday in the cozy warmth of the UNI-Dome. Heelan rolled by Creston, 59-14, in the other semifinal Thursday.

Xavier retired for the season with a 9-4 record in its first year in Class 3A.

The Saints knew Pella had a good ballclub, but the Dutch looked even better in person.

"They're a great football team," said Xavier cornerback Camden Stovie, who had one of the bright moments for the Saints when he intercepted one of Clayberg's passes in the end zone. "They definitely came out and had an edge on us and played better than us, unfortunately."

Xavier reached the state championship game in Class 4A in 2012 and 2013, but the Saints graduated most of the top players from those clubs and entered Thursday's game without leading rusher Jay Kortemeyer (ribs) and with fullback/linebacker Nic Ekland (leg) making only a token appearance in the backfield.

The Saints arrived in the UNI-Dome as a beat-up ballclub.

"Yeah, we really were," said Schulte. "I've quoted the Iowa staff before, so I'll quote them again: You just have to have next-man-in and try to play. And that's what we tried to do."

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