

Cougars, Saints clash in season opener

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 25 August 2011 16:03 - Last Updated Friday, 26 August 2011 01:20

Kennedy football coach Tim Lewis says the Xavier Saints are his team's biggest rival, bar none.

"I think so, just because of the location and 42nd Street," he said this week.

But from his end of 42nd Street, Xavier Coach Duane Schulte sees it differently.

"I think everyone else has made this into a bigger rivalry than it really is, to be honest with you," he contended.

Lewis and Schulte can debate the issue Friday night when their teams clash in the Mississippi Valley Conference opener at Kingston Stadium in southwest Cedar Rapids.

Lewis would prefer an easier game in the opener.

"But that's not how it is," he said, bracing for the 10th-ranked Saints. "We're going to come out and from the very first snap play smash-mouth football with our biggest rival."

Schulte said the Saints have nine rivals, one for every week of the season. Kennedy just happens to be this week's rival.

"I know when we first became a school it seemed like everybody made a huge fact about the rivalry, but I think that was more for the fans and the parents and some of the players, but not so much with the coaches," Schulte remarked.

"We've gotten along pretty well with the coaches (at Kennedy). I don't really look at it as a rivalry, other than the fact that everybody else calls it a rivalry.

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"We're going to have to play them sometime, so I guess we'll play whoever's on our schedule," he said. "That's the way we've always looked at it."

Lewis agrees with Schulte on one thing: There's mutual respect among the coaching staffs.

"People wanted to try and bring hatred into the thing, and there's no hatred," Lewis said. "There's respect with our staff and their staff, and a lot of kids know each other."

"It ends up being a great football game against guys that love playing football. I'd like to think we get after it, and I know they do. But people want to bring the 'hatred' part into the rivalry, and there's just none of that."

One thing is certain: They hate losing to each other.

The Saints walloped Kennedy in the opener last year, 35-7, but the Cougars got revenge by beating Xavier in the opening round of the playoffs, 11-7.

Much has changed since last season. But clubs graduated most of their starters and have new quarterbacks, but both programs are probably "reloading" rather than "rebuilding."

Reggie Schulte, the coach's son, is the new quarterback at Xavier, a former Saints ballboy who has been on the Xavier sidelines since he was practically old enough to walk.

Jimmy "Chico" Lizarraga is the new starting QB at Kennedy, the winner in a tight preseason battle with Riley Fergus.

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"It really came down to the fact that he (Lizarraga) is a senior. And I told Riley that," Lewis said. "Riley has done everything right, it's just that Jimmy hasn't done anything wrong."

"Jimmy committed himself to being the starting quarterback back in November. He never missed a workout. In fact, he would lift with us and then he'd go to one of the acceleration things and do that. And so he has made a huge commitment, and I'm glad to see that it's paying off."

Fergus, a junior, will get a chance to play other positions in addition to being the No.2 quarterback.

Kennedy and Xavier know a lot about each other, but the Cougars could have a surprise in store for the Saints. His name is Prince Kollie, a 6-foot-1, 220-pound linebacker who's been a surprise at Kennedy, too.

Kollie transferred to Kennedy from a boarding school in Illinois and is living here with his mother, according to Lewis. He is a sophomore in school.

"The first time we saw him was the first night at camp (this summer)," Lewis said. "He came walking in, and at first you do kind of a double-take because he's a good-looking kid."

Lewis plans to start Kollie at linebacker in Kennedy's 3-5 defensive scheme. Kollie began practice this month with the sophomore team, but Lewis watched him in a sophomore scrimmage last Friday and promoted him to the varsity.

"We were impressed with the way he moves and invited him up on Monday," Lewis said. "We have full intentions of starting him. He won't be a backup, he'll be a starter."

Lewis said Kollie has a great work ethic and is a good kid, but is extremely quiet.

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"Doesn't say a thing," Lewis said with a grin. "I haven't heard a word yet, but he's just one of those kids you like to coach."