

## Saints spiked by May & Wahlert

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Xavier Saints loved playing in the Class 4A state volleyball tournament this week and they plan to be back next year and do even better.

With a young team, they have every reason to think they'll be able to return to the U.S. Cellular Center in 2017.

And if they make it back to the state meet next year, they won't have to face Mackenzie May again. The Dubuque Wahlert All-American will be playing for UCLA by then.

May was as good as advertised Thursday as Wahlert topped Xavier, 25-20, 25-21, 25-15, in the semifinals of the state tournament in downtown Cedar Rapids.

The 6-foot-3 phenom blasted kill after kill against the Saints, collecting 27 for the match. And for good measure, she finished the contest with two ace serves.

"Our coaches always say she's one of the best-known players in the country. She's very good," said Xavier star Charlotte Richards. "She has a lot of skills."

Xavier Coach Austin Filer helped tutor May on the Adrenaline club volleyball team last year and knew what the Saints would be facing in the semifinals. Short of having one of his players get into a fight with May so both of them would be ejected (just kidding), there's not much anyone can do to stop her.

"I think everyone has tried just about everything against Mack," said Filer, who occasionally

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scrimmaged against May with the Adrenaline team that went to the national tournament last year. "Time after time, she's proven that she's unstoppable when she's on.



"We threw our best at her. We threw triple-blocks at her and she hit right over the top. She's a fantastic layer."

The Saints put up a good fight and had an early lead in all three sets. They grabbed a 6-3 edge in the first set and were tied at 10-10, but May went to work and led the Golden Eagles to a 25-20 victory.

Xavier raced to a 15-9 advantage in the second set, but the Golden Eagles stormed back for a 25-21 verdict. And the Saints rushed to a 6-2 edge in the third set, but May led Wahlert to a convincing 25-15 victory.

The Saints accepted a handsome plaque for reaching the semifinals. A short time later they were piling into their school vans for the short ride back to Xavier, having tasted the state tournament for the only time in their prep careers.

"It was amazing," said Jess Callahan, one of only two seniors on the varsity. "We had a lot of fun and I'm glad we could share this together."

Richards dissolved in tears when she thought about the future without Callahan and senior Lexi Noonan on the team.

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"It's been such a great season, being able to play with the seniors," she said, sobbing. "I'm going to miss them."

The Saints will return a strong nucleus next season with Charlotte Richards, Ellie McDermott, Akeela Jefferson, Emily Jasper, Anna Parr, Keera Ball, Olivia Richards and Rachel Sodawasser. In addition, Filer said there's a good group of eighth graders on the way to Xavier.

Now that the Saints have tasted the state tournament in person, they want more.

"We definitely plan on being back next year and doing some more damage," said Charlotte Richards, who finished with 15 kills Thursday. "We plan on getting even further."

If the Saints get even further next year, they'll be playing for the Class 4A state title.

The Saints set school records this season by winning 32 matches and by winning the first 18 matches of the year. They also became the first team in school history to win a match at the state tournament and reach the semifinals.

"I'm really proud of my kids," said Filer. "They're going to feel bad about this right now and they're going to hurt, because they had goals of advancing on and being the first to win a state championship as well."

"In a little bit we'll start focusing on next year and how to get better. Realistically, at the end of the day, the future is very bright."

"I know for a fact they're going to remember this game, they're going to remember being in here and loving this atmosphere at state. You can't put a feeling or a price-tag on what this means to them. It's been such a memorable experience for them."

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Xavier finished the season with a 32-10 record, including a victory over Marion in the quarterfinals of the state tournament. The Saints doubled their victory total from a year ago when they went 16-22.

Dubuque Wahlert (27-6) will play Pella (38-4) for the Class 4A title Friday at 12:15 p.m.