

Saints march back to state again

Written by Jim Ecker
Sunday, 28 May 2017 06:26 -



The Xavier Saints were sorely disappointed last year when they were upset by Hudson in the opening round of the Class 2A boys state soccer tournament.

Now they hope to make amends.

The fourth-ranked Saints dumped Mount Pleasant, 4-0, in the substate finals Saturday at Heco Field and are heading back to the state tournament for the 16th time in the last 17 years.

The Saints were one of the top-ranked teams in the state last year when they lost 3-2 in the first round.

"I think we've had a chip on our shoulder from Day 1," Xavier Coach Amir Hadzic acknowledged. "That was really a bad feeling for everybody."

The Saints (12-4) will face the Marion Indians (11-4) in the opening round of the 2017 state tournament on Thursday at 2:30 p.m. at the Cownie Soccer Park in Des Moines.

Marion is making its first trip to the state tournament in school history. Xavier makes regular trips to state and will be seeking the eighth title in its rich history.

Thomas Bean scored two goals Saturday, giving him 20 goals this season. Luke Duball collected three assists, giving him 30.

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Both of them left Des Moines last year with a sick feeling in their gut.

"That was really rough last year," said Duball, a senior who will continue his career at Western Illinois. "We just didn't have it that game. A few calls didn't go our way.



"We've been working really hard to get back," he said. "We want to take it to the teams this year. We want to win."

Motivation runs deep on the club, especially among the players who played in the state tournament last year.

"We want to go back and fix what went wrong last year," said Bean.

Jon Jacobi got things started for the Saints Saturday when he scored in the first two minutes of the match with an assist from Duball. Bean made it 2-0 in the first half on a penalty kick.

Will Hanigan, who has struggled much of the campaign with a back injury, made it 3-0 in the second half with a beautiful feed from Duball on a back-kick. Bean then finished the scoring with 28 minutes left in the game and Hadzic began to empty his bench.

"Will being in there, it means a lot to us," said Hadzic. "Not only can he score a goal, but he also opens so much space for other guys."

The Saints are the No. 1 seed in the state tournament and Marion is the No. 8 seed. Norwalk is

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the No. 2 seed.