

Xavier boys have the size to compete

Written by Jim Ecker

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Mississippi Valley Conference basketball teams could be looking up to the Xavier Saints this season.

Literally.

The Saints could put a frontline on the court that measures 6-foot-8, 6-foot-5 and 6-foot-5, and they've got another half-dozen boys who range from 6-foot-2 to 6-foot-4.

Height isn't everything in basketball, but it's a good place to start. Xavier Coach Matt Jenkins is the beneficiary as he begins his second year as Xavier's head coach.

There's a big question mark in the equation, however. Matt Nelson, the tallest player at 6-foot-8, has a knee problem and watched the Jefferson Jamboree last week in street clothes.

"We don't know when we'll have him back," Jenkins said.

Nelson is a promising sophomore and could give the Saints a formidable weapon for the next three years.

Mack Mattke is one of the 6-foot-5 players. He looked good in the Jefferson Jamboree as a post player and outside shooter with 14 points in 16 minutes.

"Mattke has done a wonderful job for us," Jenkins said. "We asked him to expand his game a little bit and go down to the post, and he's worked hard all summer long."

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Kevin Hosch, a 6-3 forward, averaged 7.9 points last season and made second team all-conference. The Saints have other experienced players in Ben McDermott (6.9 ppg), Carter Valentine (6.1), Alec Clasen (6.1), Brian Ropp (3.5) and Tanner Frazier.

Trey Sampson joined Mattke, Hosch, Valentine and McDermott in the starting lineup at the Jamboree. Clasen, Frazier, Ropp and Patrick Mullin came off the bench.

The Saints did not shoot especially well in the Jamboree, but Jenkins thinks they will. "I think it's our strength at times," he remarked.

Xavier posted a 7-16 record last season, but Jenkins doesn't want to merely reach .500 this year.

"Our goal every year is to win the MVC championship, make the state tournament and win it," he said. "In the big picture, that's what we want to accomplish."

The Saints open the season Tuesday night at Mount Pleasant.