

## Saxen finds her groove at Missouri Western

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 25 December 2011 21:40 - Last Updated Sunday, 25 December 2011 21:43

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Alex Saxen turned frustration and disappointment into a celebration last Saturday (Dec. 17) when she scored 21 points for Missouri Western State University in a women's basketball game against Washburn.

It took everyone by surprise, because the Xavier High School graduate had played a grand total of only eight minutes in Missouri Western's first eight games and was scoreless for the season.

Saxen did not play at all in five of Missouri Western's first eight games and had gotten mopup time with 3 minutes, 2 minutes and 3 minutes in the games she was allowed to play.

Frustrated and confused, she had a private meeting with Coach Lynn Plett two weeks ago to watch film and ask him questions about her role on the team.

"I said, 'What do I need to do? Sitting on the bench and watching isn't what I came here for,'" she remarked.

Saxen said they had a good conversation, then coaches and players began to encourage her in practice before Missouri Western met Washburn in Topeka, Kan. Saxen was told to be ready to play, but wasn't sure what to expect.

Plett called for "Alex" with about 12 minutes left in the first half, but Saxen figured he was calling for the other "Alex" on the team - Alex Noble, not Alex Saxen. Then she realized he wanted her.

"I was very surprised to go in during the first half," she said. "It was kind of like, 'OK, show them what you've got.'"

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She did exactly that.

Saxen entered the game with 11:44 left in the first half and scored seven points in seven minutes. She felt like a productive basketball player again, just like her days at Xavier.

"Coach came in at halftime and said, 'Alex, you're doing great.' And he told the team, 'I'm going to play the players with heart.'"

He gave Saxen the green light to drive and shoot. "He'd never done that before," she said. "It was kind of nice to have the green light."

Brimming with confidence, Saxen poured in 14 points in 17 minutes in the second half and finished with a team-high 21 points and five rebounds in 24 minutes.

Plett complimented Saxen in front of the team after the game. "He said, 'Alex, you're not a freshman anymore.' He said, 'I think we've found five players who will play with heart.'"

Missouri Western lost, 87-63, dropping its record to 2-7, but Saxen finally felt like she belonged on the club. "It's been hard, sitting on the bench while everyone plays," she said. "Saturday was a real confidence booster."

Saxen, a 5-foot-11 swing player, averaged 10.1 points as a senior at Xavier last season and was named to the All-Metro and All-Mississippi Valley Conference teams. She's a versatile player who can score inside, score outside and handle the ball.

Saxen proved her versatility against Washburn. She hit three 3-pointers, shot 5 for 9 overall from the floor and went 8 for 8 at the foul line. Prior to that game, she had taken one shot all season and missed it.

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Saxen did not let her frustrations in basketball affect the rest of her collegiate experience during her first semester. She carried a heavy academic load with 18 credit hours and appears headed for a solid B-plus average. She's interested in a degree in health and exercise science.

Saxen also joined the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, worked as a volunteer at a special needs school (helping people with disabilities) and also joined a campus leadership group.

"I like to keep busy, I guess," she said.

Saxen realizes now that taking 18 hours may have been too much, so she's taking only 12 hours this winter. Eighteen hours, including a lab, was a heavy load with all her other activities.

"That's one of the reasons my confidence got down, because I was so overwhelmed," she said. "I'll be able to focus a little more on basketball this semester."

Saxen spent the holidays on vacation with her family in Arizona. Missouri Western will practice again Tuesday at its campus in St. Joseph, Mo., for its game at Nebraska-Omaha on Dec. 31.

Saxen does not know if she'll be in the starting lineup against Nebraska-Omaha, but she's confident she'll get a chance to play.

"I'm just going to go into practice on Tuesday and work as hard as I have been," she said. "I'm just happy to have my confidence back."