

## No. 5 Xavier stifles Linn-Mar

Written by Sher Jasperse

Saturday, 04 February 2012 01:07 - Last Updated Saturday, 04 February 2012 01:44

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There are no shooting stars on the Xavier girls basketball team that downed Linn-Mar, 43-34, Friday night at home – just a galaxy of players who split playing time to keep the pressure on and share the offensive output.

The Saints (14-5, 9-5) used their relentless defense and running offense to contain the Lions and surge to a commanding 30-15 lead at the end of the third period.

Held to just five points in the second period and two points in the third, the scrappy Lions (9-9, 5-8) uncorked their offense with three triples to outscore the Saints 19-13 in the final quarter.

They pulled to within seven points, 38-31, with a minute to go in the game, but the Saints, who had embarrassed themselves with nine misses at the free throw line in the first half, hit seven of 10 freebies in the final two minutes to hold off the Lions.

Xavier senior point guard Annie Dale credited the win to her team's smothering defense and solid post play.

"Lately we've been doing a new press where we just trap the inbounds right away and it's been really effective. We always just try to run, run, run and then trap right away on the press and roll up and try to get layups," she said.

"We had the advantage inside tonight because of height, so we all just really tried to drive it and get it to the post and get people in foul trouble, and then if the posts weren't open we'd kick it out because we have good shooters, too. Our posts came really focused and ready to play tonight."

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The balanced Saints were led by Katlyn Andersen with 11 points and Dale with nine. Junior Sarah Dickes came off the bench to spark the defense and tally six points on two traditional three-point plays.

"I thought Sarah was outstanding," Xavier Coach Tom Lilly said. "It's not just the fact that she made layups under duress, but she hit the floor, hit the wall, and was able to bounce up and make a couple of free throws for some good old-fashioned 'and-ones.' She was able to defend and turn that into offense."

With Andersen and Kayla Armstrong leading the Saints with averages of 8.8 and 8.4 points, respectively, Lilly would like to see a bit more firepower from his No. 5-ranked team.

"One of our team goals was to try to find three kids averaging in double digits, and we're just a tad bit shy on that. Maybe that's a goal that's unattainable for our style," he said.

"We play a lot of kids. Our kids play about 22 or 23 minutes a game, so that's about a quarter and a little bit more that they don't have opportunities. Everybody wants to contribute and that's been our style to this point."

Linn-Mar, which had won three straight before Friday's game, also applied tenacious defense, trading shots with Xavier in the early going to eke out an 8-6 lead at the end of one period. Xavier's defense got the upper hand in the next two periods, forcing the Lions into a flurry of turnovers and desperation shots.

"Our goal is to be better each night out, and I thought we defended probably as hard and as well as we have," said Lilly. "They got some triples on us in the end, but I just think that it was a team win, and we played Monday this week so we had three solid days to prepare."

With the state tournament in his sights, Lilly said he wants his players to continue to build their defensive proficiency – and shore up their free throw shooting.

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"You have to defend when it comes to tournament time, and you have to take care of the basketball and rebound it, and we need to shoot better free throw percentages," he said. "Our goal in a pressure situation is to get Andersen the ball and force them to foul her. She's about a 90 percent free throw shooter, and we'll take that."

The Lions were led by Courtney Major with 11 points.

Linn-Mar plays a makeup game at home against Kennedy on Saturday. Xavier returns remains at home for a contest against Dubuque Hempstead on Tuesday.

LINN-MAR (34): Courtney Major 4 0-0 11, Mykaela Brandt 1 0-0 2, Sara Strauel 0 2-2 2, Hannah Yearling 0 0-0 0, Kristen Eiles 1 0-0 3, Alexis Libenguth 2 0-1 4, Jenna Harms 2 0-0 4, Lannie Nietert 2 1-2 5, Rachel Thrune 1 1-2 3. Totals 13 4-7 34.

XAVIER (43): Kayla Armstrong 1 1-3 4, Annie Dale 3 3-6 9, Katlyn Anderson 2 6-7 11, Emily Walvoord 2 2-4 6, Alex Bartz 1 3-6 5, Nicole Noonan 0 0-0 0, Ashley Stulken 1 0-0 2, Sarah Dickes 2 2-2 6, Lisa Boomgarden 0 0-0 0, Katelyn Winker 0 0-0 0, Maddie Bertsch 0 0-0 0, Hayley Deutmeyer 0 0-0 0. Team 12 17-28 43.

Halftime – Xavier 18, Linn-Mar 13. 3-point goals – Linn-Mar 4 (Major 3, Eiles 1), Xavier 2 (Armstrong 1, Andersen 1).