

Streaking Wahawks slip past Saints

Written by Sher Jasperse

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Among Metro teams and fans, No. 6 Waterloo West may be best known as the only team that has managed to tame the mighty Linn-Mar Lions.

Tuesday night, the Wahawks took down another top Metro team, defeating No. 11 Xavier 32-29 after a fierce, evenly played defensive skirmish in which turnovers were more numerous than baskets. In the end, Waterloo senior leader Jadyn Spencer won the game at the free throw line.

For Xavier (12-5, 8-4), it was a missed opportunity to topple a streaking team.

“We consider Waterloo West a state tournament caliber team, and we had every opportunity to win on our home floor,” said Coach Tom Lilly. “We just didn’t finish the job.”

The Wahawks (14-2, 10-2) led 11-7 after the first period, riding on eight points by Spencer. The Saints held her in check and collected five points from guard Annie Dale in the second period as Waterloo limped to a 16-13 half-time lead with Spencer on the bench with three fouls.

After the break, Xavier took care of the ball and benefitted from balanced scoring to take its first lead of the game, 21-20, at 4:30 in the third period. The Saints outscored the Wahawks 12-7 to eek out a 25-23 lead to end the quarter.

Both teams struggled to find the hoop in the final period until Dale hit a lay-up for Xavier with 4:47 remaining, giving the Saints a four-point edge that seemed cavernous in the low-scoring affair.

But Spencer hit a free throw and a bucket and Wahawk freshman Haley Puk launched a huge three to give Waterloo a two-point lead with 2:30 left in the game.

Xavier’s Alex Saxen tied the game at 29 with a minute to go, but Spencer was fouled at the

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other end and coolly tossed in two free throws for the lead. Saxen missed a running jumper with 10 seconds on the clock, and Waterloo got the ball into Spencer's hands one more time. She was fouled and made a final free throw to seal the three-point victory.

Waterloo West Coach Anthony Pappas breathed a sign of relief as the Wahawks kept their 12-game win streak alive.

"We're real happy to get a tough win against a good Xavier team on their home floor. We knew it was going to be a knock-down, drag-out low-scoring game, but our kids played good defense and hung in there. We just made the plays in the fourth quarter, our freshman stepped up and hit a big three when we were down after struggling all night, and then we made our free throws down the stretch."

Spencer led all scorers with 17 points – including all nine of Waterloo's free throws – in spite of an ankle injury that has her playing at less than 100 percent. "She's a warrior and she came out tonight and made some big plays and hit the big free throws and got the rebound at the end," Pappas said.

Xavier's Lilly credited his team with playing solid defense against a more experienced team. "We've just got to get better at taking care of the ball and score points."

The Saints committed 25 turnovers, seven more than the Wahawks, and missed several hard-fought shots under the basket with the game on the line.

"We had every opportunity to win this game, at least make them foul us and see if we're good enough from the free throw line. But the game was really lost in the first half with the amount of turnovers we had."

Dale led the Saints with 14 points. Saxen added 10. Jordan Johnston scored 9 points for the Wahawks.

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The path doesn't get any easier for Xavier, which hosts No. 3 Iowa City West on Thursday.

Waterloo West plays at Dubuque Senior on Friday.

WATERLOO WEST (32) : Sand 0 0-0 0, Swartzendruber 0 0-0 0, Johnston 4 0-1 9, Duric 1 0-1 3, Spencer 4 9-12 17, Puk 1 0-2 3, Hill 0 0-0 0. Totals 10 9-16 32.

XAVIER (29): Dale 6 1-3 14, Saxen 4 1-2 10, Sampson 0 0-0 0, Walvoord 1 1-2 3, Tow 1 0-2 2, Andersen 0 0-0 0, Dickes 0 0-0 0, Bartz 0 0-0 0, Boomgarden 0 0-0 0. Totals 12 3-9 29.

Halftime – Waterloo West 16, Xavier 13. 3-pointers – Waterloo West 3 (Puk, Johnston, Duric), Xavier 2 (Dale, Saxen). Fouls – Waterloo West 9, Xavier 17. Fouled out – none.