

Linn-Mar girls boot Saints, 2-0

Written by Tom Fruehling

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In a cat-and-mouse match for much of 80 minutes, the Lions of Linn-Mar scored once in each half to eke out a 2-0 win over Xavier Thursday afternoon in girls soccer on the Saints' home field.

It was the third straight victory of the young season for Linn-Mar, ranked second in Class 3A and still potent after losing only once last year, 1-0, to Kennedy in the regional final.

Xavier fell to 0-2 under first-year Coach Beth Samek after coming into the year ranked third in Class 2A.

With five returning all-staters (including three on the first team), the Lions again appear loaded for bear. Of the 19 girls on the roster, 14 of them played last year.

"We're blessed to have a lot of really good players back," said Linn-Mar Coach Steve Dickinson.

On a warm and sunny day without much wind, he substituted liberally and used the entire bench.

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"This is the first beautiful day we've had," he noted. "The others have been wet and cold. Even with a lot of subbing we still had some cramping up. It takes a while to get used to it."

Still, the Lions' superior depth seemed to leave them with fresher legs at the end.

They were the more aggressive team for much of the game but were kept out of the net by Saints goal keeper Melody Snow until the 8:22 mark in the first half.

On an assist from ninth grader Annika Menges, senior all-state midfielder Jensen Sevensen lofted a shot from the right side of the 18-yard line over the head of Snow into the upper left corner of the goal.



After a number of near-misses, the Lions didn't score again until fellow senior all-stater Olivia Garcia blasted home a dead-on penalty kick from the 12-yard line with 1:54 to go in the match.

Linn-Mar recorded 22 shots (11 of them on goal), while the Saints had 15 shots (but only a pair on goal).

In the second half, especially, Linn-Mar reeled off numerous breakaways. And Dickinson said

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he was pleased with the transition play from defense to offense. He thought his rotating back line unit of Kayla Kvach, Lexi Frese, Karlye Waterman, Jenna Ajram and sub Emily Lewis was particularly effective.

“They did a good job of looking up and finding players,” the coach pointed out. “They weren’t just punching the ball into space.”

Lion goalies Rylie Frese (yet another all-stater) and Allie Strottman each played a half protecting the net.

For her part, Samek felt her squad with 11 veteran players (but only four seniors) shook off a shaky first half and kept the match close.

“We kind of re-grouped and figured things out at the half,” she said. “I thought we more aggressive and kept possession of the ball more in the second half.

“It’s a lot better to have the ball at your feet instead of chasing it all the time.”

Samek credited senior Lizzy Bailey from the back line and sophomore midfielder Addy Hoffman for having strong games. “They both put pressure on the defense,” the coach said.

And despite the two opening losses, she’s upbeat about the season ahead.

“We’ve got a lot of kids who can get out and run,” she said. “And in each game, we’ve found one new player who’s proven her skills.”