

If you need any help with the girls basketball rankings, just ask Xavier Coach Tom Lilly for some advice.

Lilly and the Saints have faced a string of premier Class 5A teams in the first few weeks of the season and now have an impressive victory to show for their efforts.

Xavier knocked off Linn-Mar, 42-37, Friday night in the Linn-Mar gym in a battle of Mississippi Valley Conference teams that does not count in the league standings.

The Saints put up a good fight against No. 3 Cedar Falls, No. 5 Iowa City West and No. 6 Johnston in narrow defeats before breaking through against No. 11 Linn-Mar with a strong defensive performance.

"We've been kind of poking the bear a little bit the last few games against really fine competition," said Lilly. "We finally had an opportunity where we could continue to play aggressively and it paid off."

Freshman point guard Kaitlynn Daniels hit three driving layups through traffic in the last three minutes to help the Saints square their record at 3-3. Daniels hit shots that made it 34-31, 36-31 and 40-34 to keep the Lions (4-2) at bay.

Xavier is a Class 4A outfit that competes against 5A clubs on a regular basis in the MVC. It's

made them strong in the past and it could be happening again this season.

Lilly is trying to mold a new team around a handful of veterans and some inexperienced players.

"We're continually throwing flavors in the soup and we'll see what we can put on the table," he remarked.

Kylie Brown led Xavier with 13 points and Lexi Noonan had 12. Daniels finished with nine points.

The Saints celebrated in their locker room at Linn-Mar after the big victory with some hugs and shouts. "It's a party," Brown related before rejoining the fun.

"It feels really good, especially coming off the close losses we just had," she said.

The Saints lost by six points to Cedar Falls, by nine points to Iowa City West and by nine points to Johnston.

Ellie Anderson popped in four 3-pointers and led Linn-Mar with 12 points. Carly Spies added 11 points for the Lions. Kamryn Finley, a junior who has committed to Northern Iowa, began the game with a 17.8 scoring average but was held to just six points.

"We knew she would drive a lot and we wanted to stop her," said Brown. "I think we did a good job of doing that."

XAVIER (42): Stanek 0 4-5 4, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Daniels 4 0-1 9, Cooling 0 0-0 0, Brown 6 1-1 13, Noonan 5 2-3 12, Steffen 0 0-0 0, Ivester 1 2-2 4, Jasper 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 9-12 42.

LINN-MAR (37): Miller 0 0-0 0, Printy 0 0-0 0, Spies 4 3-4 12, Johnson 1 3-4 6, Renner 0 0-0 0, Frese 1 0-0 2, Anderson 4 0-0 12, Murphy 0 0-0 0, Finley 2 1-2 6. Totals 12 7-10 37.

Halftime - Xavier 17, Linn-Mar 17. 3-point goals - Xavier 1 (Daniels 1), Linn-Mar 6 (Anderson 4, Finley 1, Johnson 1).