

Kueny's clean sheet propels Hawks past Saints

Written by Mike Condon
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Curt Lewis knew his Prairie boys soccer team probably wasn't as good as its 8-0 start.

He also knew they weren't as bad as the team that had lost four of five during one stretch.

The Hawks brought a 12-4 record into Thursday night's game against a powerful Xavier team. They bent all match long, but due to the stellar play of senior keeper Adam Kueny, came away with a hard-fought 1-0 win, ruining Senior Night for 13 Xavier 12th graders.

"We haven't beat them in the last seven or eight years so this was a big result for us," Lewis said.

And that result would have been a loss without Kueny. Xavier controlled the play throughout the first half and for a good portion of the second half. The Saints had numerous good scoring opportunities, but could never get the ball past the Prairie senior.

"He's been a key to our success all year," Lewis said.

The win sends Prairie to postseason play with a 13-4 mark and a No. 5 ranking in Class 3A. Xavier, ranked No. 2 in 2A, falls to 9-5.

What makes Kueny's story more incredible is the fact he was in a battle for the starting keeper job at the start of the season. Prairie lost eight starters off last year's team and several spots needed to be filled.

"He worked extremely hard in the off-season to become the No. 1 keeper," Lewis said. "I think he has played every minute for us this year so he has been a rock for us back there this year."

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Prairie got the lone goal of the game early in the second half. JoJo Simpson ran a ball down in the corner and crossed it to Juan Loera, who won the ball from a pair of Xavier defenders and lobbed it past the keeper for the goal.

The rest was up to Kueny.

"I knew Xavier would be coming after me hard those last 20 minutes," Kueny said. "I have a great defense in front of me and they really did a great job."

Kueny's best stretch was a 2 minute, 20 second stretch just after the Hawks had scored. He made a point-blank stop on a header attempt by Ben Breitbach,. Forty seconds later, he denied Breitbach again from in close, then tipped a ball wide on a shot from Connor Ramlo.

He admitted he was a little fatigued after that Xavier flurry.

"It's been so cold all season," he said. "We ran quite a bit in practice yesterday and it was pretty warm out here again today. Xavier likes to put the ball in the box, but we forced them into a lot of crosses and were able to clear it away."

Xavier did punch one past Kueny late in the match, but Isaac Frisch's shot was waved off on an off-side call. The Saints had a couple more chances in the final two minutes, but Kueny stood tall. He raised his arms in triumph after Xavier's final shot sailed well wide before the final whistle.

"The main focus for us now is the substate," Kueny said. "We needed to get some momentum going and winning here today should give us that."

Lewis never doubted the resolve of his team during the rough patch at midseason.

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"When we were losing in that stretch, we were playing hard," he said. "We were playing great opponents in almost every match. So if you don't bring it, you are going to get beat.

"Traditionally, we have done very well at substate time," Lewis continued. "We'll play Cedar Falls on Wednesday and they beat us on Monday night...but we play at home so that should be a big advantage for us."