

Saints earn date in 4A regional finals

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Several good runs, lots of big hits and not too many errors.

Fifth-ranked Xavier merely went about its business at home Thursday night in dispatching DeWitt Central 25-17, 25-17, 25-19 in the semifinals of the Class 4A Region 6 volleyball tournament.

The Saints (28-10) will likely face a tougher test for a state tourney berth when they meet third-ranked West Delaware (36-5) Tuesday night at Dyersville Beckman.

“We seem to play much better when we're playing up in competition,” said Xavier Coach Krista Johnson. “When we play higher-level teams, we play with more excitement and energy. We need to sustain that level of play.”

The Sabers (10-24) proved to be a hard crew to put away. Though they led briefly only at the start of the first and third games, they hung around until the Saints finished with furious rallies in all three sets.

“It seemed like we'd get a little down after losing a couple of points,” said Saints star hitter Kayla Torson. “But then we'd come out firing again.

“About in the middle, we'd say, 'Come on, let's go.' We'd shake off the errors and pick it up.”

The jumping-jack junior, who led her team with 12 kills, had three big ones and a service ace to open an 8-5 lead in the opener. Even with several serves into the net, DeWitt Central stayed within one at 16-15 before Xavier closed with a 9-2 run.

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Saints senior Kasey Vanden Bosch recorded kills on the first and last points in the game. "We started out a little rough," she said. "But then we pulled it together and played our game."

"They were a really scrappy team. They've got some good hitters. But our defense stepped up, got a lot of good blocks and passes."

DeWitt looked a little demoralized in the second game after losing a couple of long rallies and falling behind 5-0 on back-to-back blocks and a spike by Vanden Bosch. But the Sabers picked up steam again, twice closing sizable deficits.

A back-breaker seemed to come when 5-foot-6 senior Emma Barta knocked in a kill from the back line to give Xavier a 22-13 lead.

It was more of the same in the final game as the Saints stretched a 9-8 advantage into a 22-13 lead on a kill by Torson and a block by senior Kara Zwanziger. A subsequent burst of saber-rattling by the Sabers fell short, however.

"I thought we stayed calm and composed," Vanden Bosch said. "We didn't get rattled and we kept playing right to the whistle."

As usual, senior libero Halle Heying was all over the floor and picked up 25 digs for the night. Senior setter Britni Scholtes collected 24 assists.

"It was a good all-around team effort," Johnson said. "Everybody played together. They did their job and took care of what they needed to do. And it paid off."