

Saints denied by West Delaware

Written by Tom Fruehling
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DYERSVILLE – Though they're far from a one-woman volleyball team, it seems that as Kayla Torson goes so go the Xavier Saints.

When she's hitting on all cylinders, the Saints are tough to stop.

Third-ranked West Delaware (37-5) pretty much put the brakes on her Tuesday night and claimed a spot in next week's state tournament with a 3-1 win in a Class 4A regional final at Beckman Catholic High School.

After dropping the first set 25-21, the very young Hawks reeled off the next three 25-21, 25-19, 25-23.

Torson, a high-flying and hard-hitting junior, has led the fifth-ranked Xavier attack all year. With 371 kills, she had more than 100 over any teammate and was seventh highest in Class 4A.

She managed only eight against the very young Hawks (half her per set average). The Hawks kept the ball away from her and were able to keep her normally lethal rocket shots in play.

"They are a very good defensive team," Torson said. "They have some really good blockers, and they got a lot of good digs. We played our hearts out, but they're just a really good team."

So, too, is Xavier (28-11) and it seemed a shame that two of the top-5 teams in Class 4A would meet in the regionals instead of the state tourney.

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"But that's the way it goes, I guess," said Saints first-year coach Krista Johnson. "These were two very good teams tonight battling for every point. They were swinging hard and playing good defense.

"West Delaware is No.3 for a reason. But our girls showed an enormous amount of fight. They're fighters, that's for sure."

And they were rarin' to go from the opening bell.

Junior Madsy Richards got a kill right off and senior Kasey Vanden Bosch spiked two in a row as Xavier roared to a 10-2 lead in the first set. The Hawks then ran off six straight to close the gap, but the Saints never trailed the rest of the way.

"We came out firing," said Xavier senior captain Halle Heying. "Everything was really clicking for us. We didn't make many errors and forced them into some mistakes. Then it seemed like we kind of sat back a little bit.

"They're a real scrappy team, and I think we got kind of tense. They made us work really hard for our points."

Even with a slew of net serves, West Delaware went ahead 19-12 in the second set. Richards (who led Xavier with 13 kills for the night) and Vanden Bosch (who had 11) sparked a couple of short rallies, but they weren't enough.

It was much the same in the third set when the Hawks tore off to a 16-9 lead. Torson smashed a big kill and followed with an ace serve. Richards spiked three straight and suddenly it was a 17-16 game with West Delaware clinging to the lead.

Once again, however, West Delaware staged a late surge and finished with an 8-3 run.

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"I was proud of the girls that after they got down in both games, they came back," Johnson said. "They played like it's not over 'til it's over."

Xavier came out much more aggressive in the fourth set. Torson saved her best game for the last, notching three kills and an ace serve along with several crucial saves with all the chips on the line. "We fought hard right to the end," she said.

The teams were never more than three points apart. The Hawks inched in front 21-18, but a Torson kill and a Vanden Bosch block knotted it up at 21-all. The Saints tied it last 23-23, but West Delaware finished it off by blocking Torson's final kill attempt.

"We pushed them all the way," said Xavier senior Kara Zwanziger. "We left everything we had on the floor."

The plucky libero Heying said if the Saints could have pulled out the final few points of game four, it might have had a different ending. "Who knows what might have happened in the fifth set," she said. "We came so close."

Fellow senior and setter-extraordinaire Britni Scholtes, who recorded 42 assists, nevertheless said it was a successful season. "I'm so proud of my teammates," she summed up. "We improved a lot during the year."

"We really wanted to win tonight. And in the last game, we were really on fire. It just wasn't enough."