

Bailey, Saints drop heartbreaker to Lancers

Written by Jim Ecker

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MOUNT VERNON - Lizzy Bailey made a bid for the Kayla Armstrong Award Tuesday night, but Bailey and the Xavier Saints fell a second short of earning a trip back to the Class 4A state tournament.

Evan Hundley scored on a putback at the buzzer to lift 10th-ranked North Scott past the 13th-ranked Saints, 47-46, in the frantic regional finals in Mount Vernon.

It was Hundley's only basket of the game and denied Xavier a chance to defend its Class 4A state title from a year ago.

Bailey poured in a career-best 24 points and hit a 3-pointer with 18 seconds left to give the Saints a 46-45 lead, but they ran out of magic.

"It's heartbreaking," said Bailey, a junior. "But they're a great team. All credit to them."

Bailey's performance was reminiscent of how Armstrong played in the state tournament last year for Xavier, when she played a pair of inspired games in the semifinals and finals and willed the Saints to the title.

Bailey had never scored more than 15 points in a varsity game before, but she nailed four 3-pointers and had the hot hand all night.

"I thought she played great," said Xavier Coach Tom Lilly. "She played great the other night against DeWitt. That was the kind of stuff we had been planning and hoping all season long.

"She decided she would finally step up and play to her skill set and it was fun to watch."

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Bailey was averaging 6.7 points and had made only thirteen 3-pointers all season in 22 games, but she had the touch against North Scott. Xavier trailed by eight points in the fourth quarter, but her 3-pointer from the corner with 18 seconds left appeared to punch Xavier's ticket to Des Moines.

"I was thinking I'd be holding a banner," she said. "No doubt about it."

Instead, the Lancers (17-6) got that regional banner and posed for pictures while the Saints accepted condolences from family and friends.

North Scott called a timeout with 16 seconds left after Bailey's clutch shot. Karly Soy drove to the basket in the final seconds and launched an off-balance shot that bounced off the rim, but Hundley was all alone on the back side for the offensive rebound and a putback for the victory.

The Saints (11-12) scored the last six points of the first half and had a 25-19 lead at intermission. Morgan Breitbach scored the first basket of the second half to give the Saints a 27-19 advantage, but the Lancers capitalized on a string of Xavier turnovers and zoomed to a 38-33 lead entering the final stanza.

North Scott blitzed the Saints, 19-8, in the third quarter.

"The third quarter killed us," said Lilly. "We lost the poise that we were able to maintain in the first half. We looked a little discombobulated and not in attack mode. And we missed a lot of chippies."

North Scott increased its lead to 43-35 early in the fourth period, but Bailey and the Saints came storming back. Breitbach pulled Xavier within 45-43 with a driving basket with 50 seconds left, then Hundley - soon to be the hero - missed the front end of a one-and-one with 32 seconds remaining.

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Hayley Deutmeyer drove the baseline and fed Bailey in the corner, and her 3-pointer found nothing but net for the 46-45 lead. It looked like the game-winner, but North Scott had other ideas.

"Their kid found a way to get to the basketball and finish the job," said Lilly. "And we didn't finish the job."

Bailey sat on the bench at the state tournament last year and watched Armstrong - an 8-point scorer for the season - pour in 23 points to lift Xavier past Harlan, 53-52, in the finals. She did her best Armstrong impersonation Tuesday, but shied away from the comparison.

"No one can beat Kayla Armstrong," she said. "We do everything for our seniors and we love our team very much. I just came out and wanted to do everything I can to go to state and give our seniors one last run. I guess the shot was on tonight, but we fell short."

Lilly had flashbacks to Armstrong and the state tournament as Bailey kept piling up the points against North Scott.

"A little bit," he said. "It's just one of those things. She won't get a chance to showcase that (at state). She sat and watched Kayla last year do that in the tournament. Unfortunately she won't get a chance to go down there and show everybody else what she can do."

Lilly said the Saints did not talk a lot about last year's state tournament prior to Tuesday's game, but they did mention it.

"We talked about trying to go back and defend," he said. "If you're the defending state champ, it would be nice to go back and do what you could to defend it."

Deutmeyer and Breitbach scored eight points apiece for Xavier.

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Freshman Karli Rucker led North Scott with 15 points and Soy had 12.

XAVIER (46): Watson 1 0-0 2, Drahozal 0 0-2 0, Deutmeyer 3 1-2 8, Bailey 8 4-5 24, Bertsch 2 0-0 4, Joens 0 0-0 0, Breitbach 4 0-0 8. Totals 18 5-9 46.

NORTH SCOTT (47): Rucker 6 2-4 15, Gallens 0 0-0 0, Soy 4 4-8 14, Schmidt 1 0-0 2, Percuoco 3 0-4 6, Edmundson 3 0-0 7, Hundley 1 1-4 3. Totals 18 7-14 47.

Halftime - Xavier 25, North Scott 19. 3-point goals - Xavier 5 (Bailey 4, Deutmeyer 1), North Scott 4 (Soy 2, Rucker 1, Edmundson 1).