

Saints stopped by Norwalk in semifinals

Written by Jim Ecker
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DES MOINES - Xavier Coach Amir Hadzic warned his players to keep an eye on No. 8 for the Norwalk Warriors Friday afternoon in the semifinals of the Class 2A boys state soccer tournament, but the warning went for naught.

Norwalk freshman Kason Crall got them anyway.

Crall got a perfect feed from the corner and used his head to score the only goal as second-ranked Norwalk defeated No.4 Xavier, 1-0, on a warm, sunny day at the Cownie Soccer Park in Des Moines.

Crall leaped high in the goal mouth with no Xavier defenders in the way and executed a perfect header over the outstretched arms of Xavier goalie Nick Huss, who leaped as high as he could but had little time to react.

"Nick Huss was phenomenal today in our goal," said Hadzic. "He couldn't do anything to prevent that."

The fourth-ranked Saints (10-10) will face top-ranked Waverly-Shell Rock (16-2) in the consolation game for third place Saturday at 1:40 p.m.

Perry defeated Waverly-Shell Rock, 2-1, in double overtime Friday and will face Norwalk (14-6) in the finals Saturday afternoon.

Xavier entered the tournament as the defending state champions and clipped Sioux City Heelan, 3-2, in overtime in the quarterfinals, but the Saints were not able to convert any of their chances Friday and fell short.

"I think for the most part it was on their defensive half, but we made one mistake and it cost us

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the game," said senior Jerry Duball.

"I thought they were pretty tough. They battled all the 3A teams (during the season) just like we did. I think they have a good sense of how we play and how they play, and I think that's what made it tough."

Hadzic was not happy with the officiating for much of the contest. He also became disenchanted with the Norwalk coaches, feeling they were deliberately stalling in the final minutes with the clock running, but his pleas fell mostly on deaf ears and led to some lively banter with the Norwalk staff.

Hadzic liked the way his team played in the first half, but felt the Saints may have wilted a little on the warm day.

"I think we had good momentum going in the first half and we had some chances," he said. "The second half we struggled a little bit. We couldn't really create as many chances as we wanted to.

"Ultimately at the state tournament it's who wants it more," he said. "And I think they (Norwalk) came in the second half with a purpose to win it. Maybe they wanted it more than we did. We didn't have enough energy to go over the hump."

Xavier has won six state titles since 2004, including three of the past four titles in 2010, 2011 and 2013, but this year they'll be playing for third place.

"We definitely should have been able to go to the finals and possibly win this year," said Duball, "but last year we went all the way and I'm happy that we at least got that."