

Saints clicking at right time of year

Written by Jim Ecker

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It took a long time for the Xavier Saints to rebuild their basketball team this season with Prairie transfer Michael Mims added to the mix in the backcourt.

From the look of things now, they've finally figured it out and could be on a roll toward the Class 3A state tournament.

Mims popped in four 3-pointers Monday night and scored 21 points as the Saints belted Benton Community, 74-44, in the semifinals of the district tournament at Marion High School.

The Saints had an 8-8 record a month ago, but they've won six straight games now and will take a 14-8 mark into the district finals Thursday night against Solon, a 42-32 winner over Marion, at Kennedy.

Mims was an all-conference point guard at Prairie last year, but Xavier already had an accomplished point guard on the club with Mitchell Burger, along with two all-conference wings in Adam McDermott and Calvin Winker.

"It took some time, because last year Mitchell dominated the ball and played point for us," said Xavier Coach Ryan Luehrsmann. "It took awhile, I think, for those two to get on the same page and jell and share the ball.

"And now that they're sharing the ball, and feeding each other and feeding their teammates, it's running a lot more smoothly."

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The Saints dominated Benton Community (8-14) from the outset. They enjoyed an 18-4 lead after the first quarter and had a commanding 40-17 cushion at halftime.

McDermott popped in three triples and scored 17 points. Winker contributed 13 points and Burger added nine points.

"We're clicking really good," said Mims. "We're getting on a roll and we're going to try and keep the ball rolling as best we can. We just needed some time to play together and get used to each other.



"We started off with a little shaky chemistry at the beginning, but we're really coming together now and we're really playing as a team."

Luehsmann said it's difficult to incorporate a new player onto an established club, no matter how talented he is.

"Particularly at point guard," he said. "It's the guy who has the keys to the car and running the show, and it normally does take a little more time. But we knew that going into it. We were patient and preparing for the end of the season."

Luehsmann said it was chemistry, not egos, that had to be resolved.

"I don't think it was anything to do with personalities," he remarked. "I just think it was chemistry in terms of how it all fit together on the floor.

"The kids all love each other, they're the best of friends, they are all encouraging to one

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another. So it just took time for everything to kind of meld together and come together.

"We have a lot of guys who are used to having the ball in their hands," said Luehrsmann. "It's hard to figure out ways to share it equally. I'm glad we finally did. It's worked out well. They're as quick as it gets in the backcourt."

Winker likes the way the parts have finally fit together.

"It was a little tough starting out at the beginning of the year with Mims coming in," he said. "We just had to get our chemistry flowing. Now we've played enough games, our chemistry is good and we're flowing now as a team."

If Xavier wins Thursday night, the Saints will play in the substate finals next Monday night at the U.S. Cellular Center for a berth in the state tournament.

"They've got one goal in mind, and they're playing together and they're playing unselfishly," said Luehrsmann. "I'm really pleased right now."

BENTON (44): Lewis 2 1-2 6, Cooper 2 1-1 5, Kraus 3 0-0 7, Wheeler 0 0-0 0, Schroeder 3 1-1 7, Eggert 3 0-0 7, Morris 2 0-0 4, Michels 1 1-3 3, Zittergruen 1 3-4 5, Steinfeld 0 0-0 0, Kinzenbaw 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 7-13 44.

XAVIER (74): Mims 7 3-4 21, McDermott 7 0-1 17, Burger 3 2-2 9, Ramlo 2 0-0 4, Klostermann 0 0-0 0, Welch 1 0-0 2, Whitten 0 0-0 0, Joens 2 0-0 5, Downey 1 0-0 3, Brems 0 0-0 0, Winker 6 1-1 13, Classen 0 0-0 0. Totals 29 6-10 74.

Halftime - Xavier 40, Benton Community 17. 3-point goals - Benton Community 3 (Lewis 1, Kraus 1, Eggert 1), Xavier 10 (Mims 4, McDermott 3, Burger 1, Joens 1, Downey 1).

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