

Saints race into 3A substate finals

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The question facing the Xavier boys coaching staff before their Class 3A district final Thursday night with underdog Solon was whether the Spartans would try to hold down the score or stick with their normal up-tempo offense.

You could almost see the Saints players' eyes light up when it became clear from the start that the quick and aggressive guys from Solon were going to try to match them point for point.

So it was run-and-gun all night for both teams up and down the Kennedy gym.

As well as they played, though, the Spartans were no match for the hot-shooting Saints in their near-perfect 88-57 runaway rout.

"In our offense, we run quite a few set plays," noted senior swingman Calvin Winker, one of four Saints in double figures. "And tonight, we scored on about every single one of them. We were really clicking."

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No one seemed more delighted with the fast-paced style of play than Xavier speed demon guard Mitch Burger, who's been on a scoring binge during the Saints' seven-game winning streak. He pumped in 20 points in the first half alone Thursday, including 4-of-6 from 3-point range and 4-of-4 on drives to the hoop.

"It was just one of those nights," Burger sort of shrugged afterward. "We spread the floor, so there's always someone open. I had a lot of open looks and my teammates found me. You've got to trust yourself in the open, and tonight I hit the shots."

"Mitch is a catalyst for us," said Xavier Coach Ryan Luehrsmann, whose vastly improving squad faces 15-8 Mount Vernon Monday at 8 p.m. at the U.S. Cellular Center with a state tourney berth on the line. "With his speed, he really pushes the tempo. And he's a pest on defense."

Burger, who ended up with 25 points, more or less quit shooting in the second half after the Saints soared to a 44-29 lead. Instead, he and fellow playmakers Connor Ramlo and Michael Mims kept the scoring juggernaut humming by dishing off to senior sharpshooters Winker and Adam McDermott.

"We were moving the ball and sharing the ball," said Luehrsmann. "And with three point guards, they were able to penetrate and make solid decisions."

"Ramlo's mature and intelligent out there and one of our toughest customers. Mims is a distributor who can also score in bunches."

While Solon defenders tried to stay with those three, McDermott ended up burning them for 24 points and Winker came on strong to finish with 17.

"We've got a lot of guys who find ways to put the ball in the hole," Winker pointed out. "And our

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team chemistry is really good right now.”



After an up-and-down year which put them at 8-8 just four weeks ago, Burger said things are starting to fall into place at the right time for postseason play.

“We’re finally starting to click,” he noted. “Everybody is sharing the ball, and we’re finding each other in the open. Everyone contributes.

“We’re really playing like a team.”

Dubuque Wahlert (14-9) will play Cresco (12-10) in the first Class 3A substate game at the U.S. Cellular Center at 6:30, with Xavier and Mount Vernon playing in the nightcap. Both winners will advance to the state tournament.

XAVIER (88): Mims 5 1-3 13, McDermott 8 5-5 24, Burger 10 1-1 25, Ramlo 1 0-0 2, Winker 8 1-3 17, Welch 0 0-0 0, Downey 0 0-0 0, Brems 0 2-2 2, Clasen 1 0-0 3, Klostermann 0 0-0 0, Joens 0 0-0 0, Stulken 0 0-0 0, Otting 0 0-0 0. Totals: 34 10-14 88.

SOLON (57): Villagrana 6 2-2 16, Rushek 1 0-0 2, Childs 0 0-0 0, Black 1 3-4 5, Coons 3 3-5 10, McIlravy 4 6-8 14, Durr 3 0-0 8, Nicol 0 0-0 0, Prybil 0 0-0 0, Proehl 0 0-0 0. Totals: 19 14-19 57.

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Halftime: Xavier 44, Solon 29. 3-point goals: Xavier 10 (Burger 4, McDermott 3, Mims 2, Clasen 1), Solon: (Villagrana 2, Durr 2, Coons 1).