

No magic for Saints against Harlan

Written by Bill Seals

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DES MOINES - Returning to face the opponent it won a state championship against in 2013, the Xavier Saints could not find the same magic this year in the opening round of the Class 4A state tournament.

The eighth-ranked Saints lost to top-ranked Harlan, 54-31, at the Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

Saints never got comfortable against the Cyclones' zone defense and length inside, struggling to make shots from the opening tip until the very end. Xavier finished the year with a 17-7 record.

The story coming in was how Coach Tom Lilly would try to counteract Harlan's post tandem of Taylor Frederick and Jess Schaben. Unfortunately for him, Xavier didn't have much of an answer all night as Frederick went off for 27 points and 15 rebounds.

Schaben never found her stroke and struggled to four points on 1-of-10 shooting, but still contributed 14 rebounds and a pair of blocks. With those two under the basket, Harlan owned a decisive 49-29 rebounding advantage.

"We put some keys up on the board," said Lilly. "We knew rebounding was going to be a big key, and they just crushed us on the boards. Schaben and Frederick do what they do and that's why they're all-staters."

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"Another key was easy opportunities, which I thought we had some early and couldn't finish off. They probably had way more easy opportunities than we were comfortable with."

With the outside shots not falling over the top of Harlan's zone defense, the Saints had nowhere to go for scoring with Frederick and Schaben occupying the middle. Xavier shot a shade under 20 percent from the field, hitting just 10-of-51 overall.

Lizzy Bailey and McKenna Andersen combined for just 4-of-22 shooting and made only two of their 12 opportunities from beyond the 3-point arc.

"We knew Harlan was a great team," said Bailey. "We didn't come out the greatest and it was an off-night for us. The shots weren't falling that well."



"We tried to regroup and collect ourselves. Those two post players are great. Our game ... we love to drive to the hole, so they really altered that and when we kicked it out our shots weren't falling. That made it difficult for us."

Turnovers and missed shots in the paint plagued both sides during a sloppy opening stretch, as the game remained scoreless until Frederick hit a layup with 3:30 left in the period. Until that point, Xavier and Harlan combined for eight turnovers and 14 missed shots. Bailey finally got the Saints on the board 18 seconds later with a 3-pointer.

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Although the Saints and Cyclones programs have been frequent travelers to Wells Fargo Arena, the players in this year's game found it hard to overcome some early jitters. Xavier hit just 3-of-14 shots in the first period, while Harlan slumped to 2-of-14. Each squad committed six turnovers as the Cyclones held a narrow 8-7 lead after eight minutes.

"That's just being nervous and inexperienced," Lilly said. "They didn't look any different than us at the beginning of the game. At least we didn't throw it into the seats, but we did everything else but that."

"It was nervous-nelly early. Eventually, the cream rises to the top so they were going to settle and do the things that got them a state title last year."

Things didn't get much better for the Saints in the second period, as they went scoreless for the first 2:30 before Jenny Dickes hit a jumper to cut the deficit to 13-9.

Xavier went on to make just a pair of shots on 12 attempts in the second period, falling behind the defending state champions 21-14 at the half. The Saints did little outside to counteract Harlan's zone defense and size advantage inside, making just 1-of-8 3-pointers through the first 16 minutes.

After inching ahead to a 10-point lead early in the second half, the Cyclones put the game out of reach with a 13-3 run to take a 39-19 lead. By the time Bailey ended the run with a free throw at the 2:10 mark of the third period, the damage had been done.

"We wanted to come out in the second half and play our game," Bailey said. "Obviously that didn't happen and they hit their shots to go on a huge run. That put a damper on things for us. I know we are capable of doing much better than we showed tonight."

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Harlan went on to outscore its opponent by an 11-point margin in the third stanza to enter the fourth with a 41-23 lead.

"You eventually start looking at the scoreboard, your chin starts dragging and it's not how you envisioned it," Lilly said. "That has a lot to do with it.

"When you're the team that's scoring the baskets and on the big runs, then things go a little bit easier for you. We didn't have any answer for Frederick in the post. She got to her drop-step and had some easy baskets."

Xavier's head coach said he was discouraged with his team's shot selection throughout much of the game, as Harlan's posts took away the aggressiveness that got the Saints to Des Moines.

"I don't think we took the best ones throughout the game," he said. "We had shots inside, but was expecting Schaben to be there to block them and she wasn't. We didn't even look to score from the interior."

Bailey, Anderson and Morgan Breitbach led the Saints with seven points.

It was a disappointing end to the season for Xavier, which finished with an overall record of 17-7, but one that produced some highlights along the way. hi

"We're pretty satisfied with what we accomplished this year and we were one of eight in probably the finest field of 4A that's ever made it down here," Lilly said. "We won a divisional conference championship and are doing it with some young kids mixed in with others. It's not like we came in with four returning starters."

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XAVIER (31): Bailey 2 2-6 7, Andersen 2 2-2 7, Breitbach 2 3-4 7, Ivester 0 0-0 0, Joens 0 0-0 0, Bastian 1 0-0 2, Stanek 0 0-0 0, Noonan 0 0-0 0, Albert 0 0-0 0, Christianson 0 0-0 0, Dickes 1 0-0 2, Nelson 1 1-2 3, Kadlec 0 0-0 0, Stovie 0 0-0 0, Drahozal 1 0-0 3. Totals 10 8-14 31.

HARLAN (54): Schaben 1 2-4 4, Wagner 3 0-2 7, Kloewer 0 1-2 1, Moser 4 1-2 10, Frederick 8 11-12 27, Bak 0 0-0 0, Bruck 0 0-0 0, Klein 0 0-0 0, Juhl 0 0-0 0, Langenfeld 0 0-0 0, Hansen 0 0-0 0, Evers 1 3-4 5, Swanson 0 0-0 0, Ahrenholtz 0 0-0 0, Hoffman 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 18-26 54.

Halftime - Harlan 21, Xavier 14. 3-point goals - Xavier 3 (Bailey 1, Andersen 1, Drahozal 1), Harlan 2 (Wagner 1, Moser 1).