

Saints drop battle of No. 2's to West

Written by Pat Harty

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IOWA CITY – Playing games on back-to-back days always presents a number of challenges.

Especially when the opponent on the second day is the vaunted Iowa City West boys basketball team on its home floor.

That was the challenge facing Xavier Saturday and it proved too much as West defeated the Saints, 72-55, at the West High gymnasium. The game was originally scheduled for Tuesday, but was postponed until Saturday because of adverse weather conditions.

The game matched a pair of clubs that are ranked No. 2 in the state by the Associated Press, with Xavier No. 2 in Class 3A and Iowa City West the co-No. 2 in Class 4A.

Both teams played Friday night – Xavier fell to Waterloo West 97-86 in Waterloo – so there were less than 24 hours to recover for Saturday's game.

Xavier also was without starting point guard Matt Mims because of an ankle injury.

"I think fatigue was a part of it tonight," said Xavier coach Ryan Luehrsmann. "I think for us, missing our starting point guard was huge.

"But really, you just have to give credit to Iowa City West. They're the best team in the state for a reason. And when they turn it up and they're running at full bore with guys like Tanner Lohaus back in the lineup, it's just awfully hard to contend with and awfully hard to deal with."

The 6-foot-7 Lohaus had been out with a foot injury since early December, but he made his return in Friday's 102-74 victory over Cedar Rapids Jefferson in which he scored six points

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while playing less than half the game.

Lohaus showed no effects from the quick turnaround Saturday, scoring 16 points on 7-of-8 shooting from the field.

“He’s not quite in shape, playing back-to-back probably was hard on him,” West Coach Steve Bergman said of Lohaus, who has signed a letter of intent to play basketball for Northern Iowa. “But it probably helped him do stuff a little bit.”

West never trailed in the game and led 17-6 after the first quarter, which saw Xavier miss nine of its 11 field-goal attempts. The Saints trimmed the deficit to 27-19 at halftime, but couldn’t get closer than six points in the second half.

“It wasn’t the best played game, I don’t think,” Bergman said. “I would imagine Ryan would say the same thing. There was a lot of effort. Some of the execution was lacking and the shooting wasn’t great. The legs were gone a little bit.”

West guard Connor McCaffery scored 14 of his team-high 19 points in the second half. The University of Iowa commit made a 3-pointer to expand West’s lead to 40-27 with 3 minutes, 36 seconds left in the third quarter. McCaffery then made another trey that gave West a 47-31 advantage.

The Trojans improved to 14-3 overall and 11-1 in the Mississippi Valley Conference. fell to 13-4 overall and 9-3 in the league.

Luehrsmann said it would take a nearly flawless performance to defeat West under any circumstance, but especially with Lohaus back in the lineup.

“You have to play a perfect game,” Luehrsmann said. “You have to take away their transition. I thought they got some easy looks on us early in transition and built a lead and they just thrive

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off of that and feed off of that.

“So I think you’ve got to slow them down and have a low-scoring game, a low-possession game to have a chance.”

Senior guard Mitchell Burger did all he could to keep Xavier in Saturday’s game with 21 points, including 17 in the second half. Burger scored 27 points in the loss at Waterloo West Friday.

“He did a nice job to his credit, and I thought he also involved his teammates a little bit as well,” Luehrsmann said. “So I’m pretty happy with his effort, as well as everybody’s.”

The West High defenders struggled to keep Burger from driving to the basket. He made one 3-point basket, but most of his points came on penetration.

“He’s always on the attack and really aggressive on the dribble,” Luehrsmann said of the 5-10 Burger. “Very few guys can keep him in front of them. He’s got that kind of speed.”

Burger said he approaches each game with the same mentality on offense, with or without Mims playing alongside him.

“Coming into the game I was just going to be aggressive, and hopefully I could get some shots to go down and get into a rhythm,” he said. “I kind of got going there for a second just on layups.”

The game became heated in the fourth quarter after a scramble for a loose ball between Burger and West guard Devontae Lane. They appeared to exchange words, but were separated.

Seconds later, Xavier center Max Techau and West center Wali Parks both were called for

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dead-ball technical fouls.

“There is no problem there,” Burger said. “There is no beef between us.”

Even with back-to-back losses over the weekend, Burger thinks his team will benefit from the experience.

“Playing against this competition is always getting us better,” he said.

“Even a loss will help us. You learn from these games. I’m not disappointed in the loss. We played hard.”

As for Mims’ status, Luehrsmann said he hopes to have him back next week.

“But we’re not sure,” he said. “It’s kind of day-to-day.”

XAVIER (55): Mitchell Burger 9-16 2-3 21, Nolan Butkowski 1-6 1-3 3, Jackson Joens 5-8 0-0 11, Max Techau 4-6 3-5 11, Ryan Stulken 2-4 1-2 5, Bryce Schulte 1-2 0-0 2, Blake Whitten 0-0 0-0 0, Spencer Dempewolfe 0-0 2-2 2. Totals 22-42 9-18 55.

IOWA CITY WEST (72): Connor McCaffery 7-14 2-2 19, Wali Parks 5-7 4-5 14, Devontae Lane 5-12 0-0 10, Alex Henderson 1-6 0-0 2, Tanner Lohaus 7-8 0-0 16, Nate Barnes 0-3 1-2 1, Patrick McCaffery 4-7 1-2 10, Dallas Majors 0-0 0-0 0, Nate Disterhoft 0-0 0-0 0, David Pederson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 29-57 8-15 72.

Halftime - Iowa City West 27, Xavier 19. 3-point goals – Xavier 2 (Burger, Joens), Iowa City West 6 (C.McCaffery 3, Lohaus 2, P. McCaffery). Fouls – Xavier 12. West 13. Fouled out – Techau. Technical fouls – Techau, Parks.