

Feltes anchors Saints on wounded knees

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jamie Feltes suffered a torn ACL in her right knee when she was in the fifth grade and just 11 years old, an awfully young age for an athlete to begin fighting knee problems.

She suffered another torn ACL - this time in her left knee - in April of 2015, just a few months before her junior campaign with the Xavier High School softball team.

She did not have an operation either time, either for the partial tear in the fifth grade or the complete tear last year.

"Last season I decided to play because I didn't want to lose a whole season with it," she said Tuesday. "I have a history of knee problems, so I wasn't going to mess with it too much and I kind of let it go."

Feltes, now a senior and a rock at third base for the Saints, has been a starter for the varsity ever since she was in the eighth grade, balky knees or not. She was back at her post Tuesday night, although she was a little late for the opener against Waterloo East after attending an orientation session at the University of Iowa, where she plans to become a nurse.

Feltes and the Saints swept Waterloo East, 11-3 and 9-5, at Bob Erusha Field with Maria Steffen collecting the win in the first game and returning for a save in the nightcap.

Feltes owns a gold glove at third base with her quick reactions and strong throws, and she still runs well despite the braces on both of her knees. She scooted from home to second base in a flash when she belted a double off the left-field fence in the first game and made a series of fine defensive plays at the hot corner.

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"I've gotten a lot of help from my physical therapist and all that good stuff," she said. "It was really rough last year, but it's a little better this year. I'm a little more comfortable with it."

Feltes does not plan to play softball in college, so this will be the end of her successful career.



"I would if I could, but I don't know if I can hold up too much longer," she remarked.

"Yup, this is the end. Sad, I know," she said. "I'm kind of putting off the thought. I'm enjoying it while it's here."

The Saints enjoyed Tuesday's sweep of Waterloo East, especially after losing a pair of one-run games to Burlington on Saturday, 9-8 and 8-7 at home. The Saints had an 8-0 lead in the first game against Burlington but saw it slip away.

Xavier raised its records to 5-8 overall and 4-6 in the Mississippi Valley Conference Tuesday and raised its hopes of getting on a roll after a slow start.

"I preach to them - when they're focused, when they're determined, when they're playing their game - a ton of good things are going to happen," said Xavier Coach Nikki Gahring. "When they come and they're not focused and they take pitches off, you see what happens."

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"It's kind of a good reality check," she said. "We know what can happen, because we've seen it. But we also know what can happen when we're not focused and we're not determined."

Steffen pitched a complete game in the opener and tossed 2 1/3 innings of relief in the nightcap, saving the game for Ellie Malecek. Steffen began the night with a 6.14 ERA after posting a neat 2.47 ERA last year as a freshman, but she looked to be in good form Tuesday when she allowed only three earned runs in 9 1/3 innings.

"Tonight she showed what she can do when she's focused," said Gahring. "She's a strong kid with some stamina, but she's just like the rest of them."

"If she's not focused, things don't necessarily happen the way we'd like them to. When she's focused in a zone, a lot of good things are going to happen."

Charlotte Richards had three hits and two RBIs for Xavier in the first game. Stephanie Wehr drove in three runs, Cassie Himmelsbach had two RBIs, Charli Patten had two hits and two RBIs, and Olivia Richards had two hits.

Himmelsbach had two hits and scored three runs in the second game. Patten scored three times and Olivia Richards had two hits.

Patten, normally a backup catcher, did a good job at shortstop Tuesday in place of Hannah Helms, who is currently sidelined with an injury.

Waterloo East, which owns conference wins over Washington, Dubuque Senior, Linn-Mar and Hempstead, fell to 4-8 overall and 4-6 in the league.