

Saints nearly topple No. 1 IC West

Written by Jim Ecker

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Step by step, inch by inch, the Xavier baseball team is getting much better.

The Saints proved it Friday night when they nearly upset top-ranked Iowa City West before falling, 5-4, in nine innings in the first game of a Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader at Ken Charipar Field.

Iowa City West rolled in the nightcap, 15-2, in five innings.

The Saints had the winning run at second base in the bottom of the seventh inning and again in the bottom of the eighth inning of the opener, but both opportunities slipped away and the Trojans prevailed in the ninth.

Xavier began the season with nine straight losses, but they won two games this week and pushed Iowa City West to the limit in the space of four days.

"I think we're right there," said junior Bryce Schulte, who has played six different positions for the Saints this season. "I think we've got a lot of momentum going. We're trying to find our groove a little bit with those two wins earlier in the week.

"That first game tonight, we were right there. I think we're kind of finding it right now."

Bob Cataldo, in his first year as head coach, likes the attitude and dedication he's getting from

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the players, especially after a disappointing start to the season.

"I love the progress we're making," he said. "The kids are learning the right approach to playing the game the right way.

"We took a good team nine innings tonight. Tip your hat, because they found a way to win. We're going to find a way to win, too."

Adam Tvedt pitched seven strong innings for Xavier in the first game and left with the score tied, 3-3. He struck out three batters, allowed six hits and walked only one man.

Nick Kamin reached second base with two outs in the bottom of the seventh of the opener, but was stranded at second. Schulte reached second base with one out in the eighth inning and the Trojans gave Gabe Lux an intentional walk, putting runners at first and second, but the Saints hit into a double play.



Iowa City West scored two runs in the top of the ninth on an RBI double by Nate Disterhoft and an RBI single by Logan Sims. Xavier retaliated with one run in the bottom of the ninth to pull within 5-4, but they stranded the tying run at third base.

Schulte pitched the last two innings for Xavier and was charged with the loss. Tanner Lohaus tossed the first six innings for Iowa City West. Zach McLean pitched two scoreless innings in relief for the victory and Dane Randall got a save.

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Iowa City West led the nightcap, 3-2, after two innings, but the Trojans scored 10 runs in the third inning on six walks and four hits, including a grand slam home run by Jason Strunk. Nathan Barnes pitched a complete game for the victory.

Cataldo said the next step in his team's development needs to come on the mound.

"We really have to dial in our pitching," he remarked. "We throw too many pitches, and this game comes down to pitching.

"It's not that you have to overpower people, but you have to find the strike zone. It's a simple game. It really is. To me, it's more of a mental problem than a physical problem."

Cataldo is encouraged, despite the team's records of 2-11 overall and 0-7 in the conference.

"They're catching on. That's what's encouraging to me," he said. "You can see it in their eyes when it's working.

"And it's also good to see when it's not working, they recognize what the issues are and what's the problem."

Cataldo said Bryce Charipar, one of Xavier's top players, will be sidelined indefinitely with a neck injury. Nolan Butkowski, who began the season as the starting second baseman, is expected to return soon from a sprained ankle.

Iowa City West raised its marks to 12-3 overall and 7-1 in the MVC.

Xavier has a doubleheader at fifth-ranked Jefferson Monday night.