

Sad day for Saints at state tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 03 March 2017 19:06 -



DES MOINES - There were 42 seconds left in Xavier's loss to North Scott in the Class 4A state basketball tournament Friday morning when Coach Tom Lilly sent seldom-used senior Lauren Cooling into the game.

The Saints trailed by only seven points at the time and Lilly could have kept his starters on the floor and prayed for a miracle, but he wanted to make sure Cooling got into the game for a taste of the state meet.

Lauren Cooling's mother, Sue, died Wednesday from cancer. She was only 54 years old.

Two days later, Lauren took the floor for the semifinals of the state tournament at Wells Fargo Arena and there wasn't a dry eye among the Xavier players, coaches and fans.

"At some point in time you recognize the situation and that basketball is not the most important thing at that moment in time," said Lilly, who has won 523 games and four state titles in his career.

"Nobody on our team would have argued with the fact that she needed to see the court at some point in time."

The sixth-ranked Saints fell to eighth-ranked North Scott, 58-49, mostly because they committed too many turnovers, committed too many fouls and could not keep the Lancers off the offensive backboard.

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The Saints were naturally disappointed with the setback, but there were not as many tears as you might expect when a team's season comes to an end. Perhaps they shed most of them in the previous 48 hours after one of their beloved teammates lost her mom.

"It's been really hard," said senior Kiana Stanek. "Lauren has always been the most positive person and they have a great family. We wanted to get as far as we could for her. We've been playing for her.

"We're just happy she got to go in and see the floor," said Stanek. "Her mom would have been proud."

Cooling had played in only nine games all year and scored just six points. She got open and took a shot with eight seconds left Friday, but the ball refused to go through the basket.



"It would have been nice if she had been able to hit that shot," said Lilly. "That would have really made it special."

It was special anyway.

"Lauren is an incredible person," said Lexi Noonan, who overcame early foul problems to score 20 points for Xavier. "I'm really happy she was able to share the game with us."

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Many of Lauren's friends, classmates and teammates joined in a prayer session at the Xavier High School chapel Thursday.

"Our seniors took it really, really hard," said Noonan, "especially the seniors who are close to Lauren and her family. That kind of stuck in the back of our minds today."

The Saints fell behind by nine points in the first half with Noonan sitting on the bench with three fouls, but they rallied and took a 36-34 lead on her field goal with 1:30 left in the third quarter.

"I thought we had momentum and we were finally getting our energy back into the game," she said.

It wasn't meant to be. North Scott responded with a 15-4 spurt for a 49-40 advantage with 90 seconds left and the Saints could not respond.

North Scott (20-5) will face the top-ranked Marion Indians (24-1) in the Class 4A championship game Saturday at 6 p.m. Marion topped Pella, 33-24, in a low-scoring affair in the other semifinal Friday.

North Scott beat Xavier at the foul line. The Lancers made 28 of 34 free throws, including 17 of 18 in the fourth quarter. By comparison, the Saints were 9 for 11 at the foul line for the entire game.

North Scott hurt the Saints with 16 offensive rebounds, leading to put-backs and free throws. Grace Boffeli led the Lancers with 17 points and nine rebounds. Karli Rucker, who will play at Northern Iowa, scored 14 points and her sister Rylie Rucker scored 11.

The Rucker sisters made only 4 of 21 shots from the field, but they were 16 of 19 at the foul line.

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The Saints saw their 11-game winning streak come to an end and finished the year at 18-7.

"This team was special," said Noonan, one of the graduating seniors. "We all played unselfishly. No-one cared about stats, which made it so awesome to play with them. They were the best teammates I could ask for."

The Saints had a losing record last season, but they turned things around and came within one victory of playing for the state title.

"I'm pretty happy with what they were able to do," said Lilly. "I hope they are too. If you don't win it all, you're sad the last game."

"We certainly wanted a chance to play for the title, but tonight was not our night ... I guess this morning was not our morning."

"We never lacked heart or effort," said Stanek.

XAVIER (49): Stanek 0 1-2 1, Daniels 2 0-0 5, Brown 3 0-0 7, Noonan 7 4-4 20, Ivester 4 0-0 8, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Cooling 0 0-0 0, Steffen 1 2-2 4, Callahan 0 0-0 0, Stovie 1 2-3 4. Totals 18 9-11 49.

NORTH SCOTT (58): Case 1 0-0 2, K.Rucker 3 7-8 14, Bogner 0 0-0 0, R.Rucker 1 9-11 11, Boffeli 6 5-7 17, Loussaert 2 4-4 9, Moeller 1 3-4 5. Totals 14 28-34 58.

Halftime - North Scott 28, Xavier 23. 3-point goals - Xavier 4 (Noonan 2, Daniels 1, Brown 1), North Scott 2 (K.Rucker 1, Loussaert 1).