

Saints foiled in possible 4A farewell

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 27 October 2011 01:04 -

BETTENDORF - Maybe the Xavier Saints are right, maybe they should quit 4A football and pick on schools their own size next year.

But if Wednesday night's playoff game was their final appearance in Class 4A - and it's still a small "if" - the Saints left with a memorable performance.

Xavier and Pleasant Valley staged a terrific game on a crisp autumn night before the home-town Spartans emerged with a 33-31 victory in a Class 4A playoff opener.

The Saints recovered a loose ball near midfield with 60 seconds remaining, enough time to drive for a game-winning field goal, but the officials ruled the play was dead before the ball popped loose. Pleasant Valley kept the ball and ran out the clock.

Xavier fans booed lustily.

"I couldn't really tell," said Corbin Woods, who recovered the ball for the Saints. "I saw the ball pop out and I just went on top of it.

"I didn't have the best view either. I just saw the ball and I hopped on top of it. That's all I could really do."

The Saints did all they could do on offense to win the game. Quarterback Reggie Schulte played the game of his life, completing 23 of 27 passes for 312 yards and two touchdowns, but the Saints had trouble stopping Pleasant Valley's hot offense.

The Spartans (8-2) rushed for 308 yards and passed for 116 more, using a tricky option attack that featured just about every formation known to mankind, including the wishbone.

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"It makes us multi-dimensional," Pleasant Valley Coach Rusty VanWetzinga said. "So far it's been pretty tough to stop."

The Saints (5-5) were tough to stop as well. Carter Valentine rushed for 113 yards and two touchdowns, giving Xavier 439 yards of total offense. Pleasant Valley finished with 424, so there wasn't much to choose from there.

It's not fair to pick on Xavier placekicker Chad Gilmer, but Pleasant Valley booted a pair of field goals and the Saints went 1-for-2, with Gilmer connecting from 41 yards but missing from 34. Those absent three points spelled the difference, but lots of plays spelled the difference Wednesday night.

"I just wish we would have come out on top," Coach Duane Schulte remarked. "I'm proud of our kids. They played hard. They faced a lot of adversity this season and they battled through and hung with it. We're proud of them."

Reggie Schulte found seven different receivers and sizzled all night, hitting Woods and Kevin Hosch with touchdown passes. Jordan Hoffman and Valentine caught seven passes apiece and Woods nabbed three for 72 yards.

"We were just trying to put the ball where they weren't," said Schulte, a junior. "We kind of rotated some guys in, just to get them at different spots. They made some nice catches and good plays tonight."

Xavier tied the game, 17-17, with two big plays to start the third quarter. Nick Steingreaber raced 53 yards with the second-half kickoff, then Valentine broke loose on the first play from scrimmage for a 42-yard touchdown.

Pleasant Valley grabbed a 24-17 lead, but the Saints responded with a 16-yard touchdown pass from Schulte to Hosch to make it 24-24 late in the third period.

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The Spartans took a 30-24 lead on the first play of the fourth quarter when Dylan Latham, a star all night, capped a 75-yard drive with a 1-yard plunge. Latham carried the ball 28 times for 193 yards and is a big reason Pleasant Valley will face Bettendorf in the second round of the playoffs Monday night.

Xavier blocked the PAT after that touchdown, keeping it a six-point game, but the Spartans made it 33-24 when Ben Trewyn booted a 38-yard field goal with 4:36 remaining.

The Saints marched 72 yards and pulled within 33-31 on a 1-yard touchdown by Valentine and the PAT by Gilmer with 1:21 left.

Xavier tried an onside kick, but Pleasant Valley recovered at midfield with 1:18 left. The Saints had only one more timeout, so it looked like the game was over, but L.J. Redmond carried on first down and lost the ball when he was tackled.

Xavier celebrated, but not for long. The referees said the fumble occurred after the play was done.

"We have to play them as the refs see them," Coach Schulte said. "He made the call, so we have to live by it and go from there.

"I'm not criticizing the refs. They made the call and we have to go with it."

If the refs had given the ball to Xavier near midfield, the Saints would have needed about 25 yards to give Gilmer a reasonable chance of kicking a game-winning field goal.

"It would have been interesting," Woods said. "It would have made it a lot more fun to get into field-goal range or something like that."

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Instead, Latham ran for 13 yards and the game ended with a couple of kneel-downs by Pleasant Valley quarterback Grant Lang, who played a strong game for the Spartans. Lang excelled as a passer (9 of 13 for 116 yards) and runner (14 carries for 86 yards).

The scoreboard lights were still shining when the Saints headed home, showing a 33-31 triumph for the home team. And it could have been the final 4A game for the visitors.

If the IHSAA adopts district football for Class 4A, as expected, the Saints undoubtedly will elect to play 3A ball in 2012. Their 14-year marriage with 4A could be over, highlighted by the 4A state title in 2006.

"If this is our last 4A game, then we got beat by a worthy opponent and it was a heck of a ballgame," Coach Schulte remarked. "We'll always remember it."

The Saints acquitted themselves quite well as a 4A team in the Mississippi Valley Conference, battling schools that were twice as big.

"I think we've proven over the past years that we've had a good team and we can compete with those guys, but if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be," Reggie Schulte said. "We'll look to compete in 3A next year, but I think we can play with these teams."

The Saints finished the 2011 campaign with a 5-5 record that bears closer scrutiny. They lost to five teams that have a combined record of 43-7 with setbacks to Linn-Mar (10-0), Cedar Falls (9-1), Iowa City High (8-2), Iowa City West (8-2) and Pleasant Valley (8-2). All five of those teams are still alive in the playoffs.

"Five losses to really good football teams. There's not much you can say about that," Coach Schulte remarked. "We played really good football teams and ended up getting beat. Sometimes that's what happens."

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Reggie Schulte will return at quarterback next season along with 32 other juniors and an undefeated sophomore team. Steingreaber, who had a 67-yard kickoff return in addition to his 53-yarder, also returns. So does Woods, who caught 33 passes this year.

The Saints could have a heck of a 3A ballclub in 2012.

PLEASANT VALLEY 33, XAVIER 31

CRX PV

First Downs	19	26
Rushing	29-127	59-308
Passing	23-27-0	9-13-0
Passing Yards	312	116
Punts	3-30.7	1-22.0
Penalties	6-50	2-10
Fumbles/Lost	1/1	1/1

Xavier	0	10	14	7	- 31
Pleasant Valley	3	14	7	9	- 33

SCORING PLAYS

PV - Ben Trewyn 42 FG
PV - Grant Lang 1 run (Trewyn PAT)
CRX - Corbin Woods 12 pass from Reggie Schulte (Chad Gilmer PAT)
PV - Dylan Latham 3 run (Trewyn PAT)
CRX - Gilmer 41 FG
CRX - Carter Valentine 42 run (Gilmer PAT)
PV - Jason Stewart 12 pass from Lang (Trewyn PAT)
CRX - Kevin Hosch 16 pass from Schulte (Gilmer PAT)
PV - Latham 1 run (PAT blocked)
PV - Trewyn 38 FG
CRX - Valentine 1 run (Gilmer PAT)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

XAVIER

Rushing: Valentine 17-113, Hansen 3-11, Ball 6-11, Schulte 2-minus 4,

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Woods 1-minus 4.

Passing: Schulte 23-27-0, 312

Receiving: Hoffman 7-81, Valentine 7-68, Woods 3-72, Hosch 2-32,
Hansen 2-12, Grimm 1-37, Ball 1-10

PLEASANT VALLEY

Rushing: Latham 28-193, Lang 14-86, Beswick 7-22, Redmond 4-23,
Team 2-minus 4, Infeisto 4-minus 12.

Passing: Lang 9-13-0, 116

Receiving: Stewart 5-61, Latham 1-25, Beswick 1-16, Ralston 1-10,
Sheeder 1-4