

Saints begin historic journey with squeaker

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 07 June 2012 23:34 -

MUSCATINE - The Xavier Saints, trying to make history at the girls state soccer tournament this week, battled two opponents at the Muscatine Complex on Thursday.

They battled a slight case of jitters as they seek their seventh state title in a row. And they battled a team from ADM/Van Meter that didn't realize it was overmatched.

The Saints managed to conquer both.

Marinna Shroud and Kayla Armstrong scored goals as the No. 1 Saints trimmed No. 10 ADM/Van Meter, 2-1, in the quarterfinals of the Class 2A tournament on a hot, sunny day.

Xavier (16-2) will face Sioux City East (18-1) in the semifinals Friday at 4:30 p.m. on Field 3.

The Saints are striving to become the only program in the history of Iowa girls sports to win seven straight titles in any sport. Cedar Falls won six straight swimming titles (1993-98), Bettendorf won six straight tennis titles (1995-2000) and Dubuque Wahlert won six straight volleyball titles (2000-2005), but nobody has ever won seven straight in any sport.

There's a lot at stake for Xavier, so it's no wonder the Saints had the jitters.

Annie Dale, one of Xavier's captains and a veteran of three state championship clubs, felt them before Thursday's game.

"It's been a different feeling going into the state tournament each time," she said. "I'm a little more nervous, but being a senior I know I need to lead the team, so I can't really act nervous. I just have to be ready to go."

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Armstrong, who netted her 30th goal of the season, also felt the jitters. "It's always nervous coming into state," she said. "There's always high expectations for everybody."

This year, the expectations may be higher than ever.

Armstrong knocked in a shot with her left foot for a 1-0 lead with 16:13 left in the first half. "Finally," said Coach Doug Graham, frustrated the Saints had dominated play but had nothing on the board until then.

Marinna Shroud blasted in a shot from in front of the goal with 9:57 left in the first half with an assist from Monica Busse and the Saints appeared on their way to an easy victory, but they didn't score again in the final 49 minutes.

There wasn't much to worry about until ADM freshman Emily Hoffmann scored on a breakaway with 14:50 left in the game to pull the Tigers within 2-1 with plenty of time remaining. Hoffmann's goal put the Saints in jeopardy, but they safely rode out the match.

Armstrong had several good opportunities to give Xavier a safer lead, but missed by a smidgen each time. A couple of her near-misses clanged off the crossbar.

"It's always frustrating when it seems like the bar is the biggest part of the goal," she said. "But tomorrow, hopefully, it will fall in and I've got all the bar-shots out of the way."

Graham thought the Saints should have had several more goals.

"Absolutely," he said. "We could have had a dozen. Their goal keeper (Mallory Schultze) played tremendously. Made some fantastic saves."

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Sara Chicchelly got the victory in goal for the Saints.

Graham said he's scouted Sioux City East and has an inkling what to expect in the semifinals. "Good team, strong team," he said.

Glenwood (18-1) will play North Scott (11-9) in the other Class 2A semifinal Friday. The championship match is scheduled for Saturday at 1:30 p.m.