

Xavier girls aiming for historic victory

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 08 June 2012 23:49 -

MUSCATINE - The Xavier Saints know what's at stake Saturday at the girls state soccer tournament in Muscatine.

It's not merely the possibility of winning another state title, although that would be nice. No, the Saints have a possible date with destiny.

If they whip No. 14 North Scott for the Class 2A title, they'll become the first program in the 86-year history of high school girls sports in Iowa to win seven consecutive crowns in any sport.

Four teams have won six state titles in a row, but none have ever won seven in a row. Until now, perhaps.

"Oh my gosh. I don't want to talk about it," said senior Annie Dale. "It's crazy what's at stake."

The top-ranked Saints (17-2) will meet upset-minded North Scott (12-9) in the championship match on Field 3 Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

Xavier cruised into the finals with an easy 5-0 victory over Sioux City East Friday afternoon.

Dale scored less than two minutes into the game, Kayla Armstrong followed a few minutes later and the lead grew to 3-0 with 22 minutes left in the first half when Armstrong scored again. Xavier Coach Doug Graham was able to rest several of his top players in the second half, getting ready for the grand finale on Saturday as the Saints go for their seventh crown since 2006.

"If it does work out, it's going to be very, very sweet," said Graham, the Londoner who has led the Saints to their last three titles.

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The Xavier players know exactly what's going on. They know about the possibility of making state history and embrace the challenge.

"Our goal is to win and put Xavier in the record book," said Armstrong, who has poured in 32 goals as a junior. "We always seem to be taken for granted and that coming to state is just another thing for us, but we can be part of history."

Cedar Falls won six straight titles in girls swimming (1993-98), Bettendorf won six straight in girls tennis (1995-2000), Dubuque Wahlert won six straight in volleyball (2000-2005) and Xavier has won six straight in girls soccer (2006-2011).

The Saints can break that tie on Saturday.

"We know we can do it," said Dale, who finished with two goals Friday. "We have great support, we have people coming out. And we know if we stay focused we can get the job done."

Graham has talked to his players about the historic significance of this year's tournament, but he planned to intensify those talks now that the championship game is here.

"Of course we're cognizant of it and we want to win it, because we want all of those good things," he said. "But we do have to take it one at a time and we can't overlook anybody."

Graham planned to tell his players a few stories before the game against North Scott to get them ready and keep them loose.

"I've got a few for the bus ride home tonight and a few for the bus ride here tomorrow," he said. "I think I just have to tell them there's going to be one big party if we win tomorrow's match."

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"They'll be dancing in the streets of 42nd Street tomorrow night."

If the Saints dance to the east on 42nd Street, they might bump into the Kennedy Cougars coming the other way. Kennedy will face top-ranked Ankeny in the championship match of the Class 3A tournament at 4 p.m. Saturday, right after the Saints play North Scott for the 2A title.

Dale, one of Xavier's captains, thinks Graham has talked about a seventh title a little too much already.

"It puts a lot of pressure on us," she said. "We know it's a big deal if we were to win the seventh title. We really do try not to think about that because it kind of stresses us out. So we're just going to try and play our hardest and hope we get that seventh title."

Mary Levett, another captain, credits Graham with keeping the focus on the team and not entirely on the record.

"I think he's done a good job of making sure we improve and come together, but at the same time not talking about it too much to freak us out," she said.

"Now I guess I can get a little freaked out," said Levett, laughing. "Up until now it's really just been pretty much the same."

Levett has played for the varsity since she was a freshman, so she knows what it's like the night before a state championship match. "I think I always wake up a little bit in the middle of the night," she said, "and I don't know if I get back to sleep."

Dale began the scoring Friday with 38:37 left in the 40-minute first half with an assist from Lauren Konchar. Armstrong made it 2-0 with 34:58 left in the half when she outraced two

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defenders for the ball and completely undressed the Sioux City East keeper with her deft footwork. Armstrong looked up and saw nothing but net a few yards away, with no one else in sight.

"I didn't want to blow it," said Armstrong, who gently nudged the ball into the goal following a long pass from Lucy Martin.

Armstrong made it 3-0 with a left-footed blast with 22:34 left in the first half with another assist from Martin. Dale scored with 31:59 remaining in the game on an assist from Sydney Wright to make it 4-0, and Konchar finished the onslaught with 10:57 left.

Sara Chicchelly had a fairly easy day in goal and posted the shutout with seven saves.

Now comes the final push for the record book.

"It really is a big deal," said Dale, "but at the same time we'll just try to play and then celebrate."