

No.12 Saints spike Lions, 3-0

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Xavier Saints won't have to beat the biggest schools in Iowa to reach the state volleyball tournament this year, but they don't think that gives them an advantage.

The IGHS AU created an extra class for girls volleyball this season, putting the 40 largest schools in Class 5A, but the Saints think they'll have plenty of competition in 4A.

"There are still just as many good teams in the class that we're in, so it's still going to be tough," senior Melissa Everett said Tuesday night. "But we're pretty determined."

The 12th-ranked Saints opened the 2012 campaign Tuesday with an impressive 25-21, 25-12, 25-21 verdict at Linn-Mar, which is unranked in Class 5A.

Class 4A is loaded with top-ranked Sioux City Heelan, No. 2 Harlan, No. 3 Solon, No. 4 Waverly-Shell Rock and No. 7 Dubuque Wahlert from the Mississippi Valley Conference, among others.

"There are still going to be really good teams in 4A," said senior Sarah Homan, who had a big night for the Saints with 25 assists.

Xavier Coach Barb Brunow agreed with her players about the caliber of competition in Class 4A this year. She said the high caliber of club programs in Iowa has improved the level of play all over the state.

"Anymore, the size of the schools does not determine the power of the game," she said. "Just because we're in a smaller division does not mean it will be any easier."

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Easy or not, the Saints would love to play in the state tournament this November at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena. "Our ultimate goal is to win the tournament," Homan remarked.

The Saints rarely trailed Tuesday night and looked like a polished, well-balanced outfit.

"One of the best things about our team is the chemistry and how well the girls work together," Brunow said. "That's probably our strongest point."

Kayla Torson collected 10 kills for the Saints, Everett had nine and Kasey VandenBosch finished with eight. Halle Heying had 12 digs and Emma Barta came up with 10.

"I think we did really well," Homan said. "We're really excited to play this season."

Linn-Mar faced an uphill struggle all night.

"I think for the first match we looked pretty good," Everett said. "We have improvements to make, but for the first match it was pretty good. I'm pretty happy."

Megan Allmandinger had nine kills for the Lions. Meg Gostonczik had seven kills and Sarah Renner had three aces.