

Jelinek Bowl? Nope, just Saints vs. Hawks

Written by Jim Ecker

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Craig Jelinek does not want Friday night's big football game between the Xavier Saints and Prairie Hawks to be about him in any way, shape or form.

It looks like he'll get his wish.

Jelinek, 60, compiled a 106-96 record in 21 years as Prairie's head football coach. He retired after the 2010 campaign, but returned to the sidelines this season as a volunteer assistant for Xavier.

The Saints visit Prairie Friday night, which means Jelinek will stand on the visitor's sideline and will head into the visitor's locker room at John Wall Field after spending all those years as head coach of the home team.

"The schedule says XAVIER at Prairie on September 7th," he noted. In other words, it doesn't say JELINEK at Prairie, and that's exactly the way he wants it, with the focus on the teams, not him.

Prairie star Demetrius Harper, who played on the varsity for Jelinek in 2010 as a sophomore, plans to shake his old coach's hand, but doesn't plan to alter his pre-game routine to chat with the man who used to call the plays.

"I won't do it during warmups. I'll do it after the game," Harper said Wednesday at practice.

Harper appears to have taken the transition from Jelinek to new coach Mike Morrissey in stride. He learned that Jelinek planned to retire about midway through the 2010 campaign.

"And I was like, 'Well, whoever the new coach is, I guess he'll help me out at wide receiver a little bit more, and I'll understand the offense a little more, too,'" said Harper, a talented

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receiver and kick return specialist.

Morrissey, a former college quarterback, has installed a spread offense at Prairie, with four wide receivers and lots of passes. Jelinek played it closer to the vest, so the coaching change may have worked in Harper's favor in terms of style.

Morrissey respects what Jelinek accomplished at Prairie, but said he's not aware of any special tributes being planned for Friday's game.

"It's about our kids and Xavier's kids," said Morrissey. "That's kind of the focus we're taking."

Both clubs head into the game with 2-0 records in the Mississippi Valley Conference. The Saints are ranked No. 7 in Class 4A by the Des Moines Register and are favored to win the game, but the Hawks are armed and dangerous.

Prairie quarterback Jace Hanna passed for 333 yards and four touchdowns in a 41-33 victory over Kennedy last week. He also carried the ball 14 times for 85 yards and a touchdown to finish with 418 yards of total offense and five TDs.

Harper caught 13 passes for 134 yards and two touchdowns against the Cougars and also returned a kickoff 90 yards for a score. Jarred Edmonds caught four passes for 112 yards and one touchdown against Kennedy in the aerial display.

Xavier can fling the ball effectively, too. Reggie Schulte has completed 20 of 26 passes (76.9 percent) for 365 yards and seven touchdowns this season with just one interception. He has talented receivers in Bryce Grimm, Jim Moore and Corbin Woods.

The Saints also feature a strong running attack with tailback Cal Stovie, who has rushed 24 times for 264 yards and two touchdowns in blowout victories over Dubuque Hempstead (48-7) and Jefferson (49-0).

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The Saints have a more balanced attack than the Hawks, but both offenses are capable of producing big numbers.

"We're kind of different," said Hanna. "They're more 'power' style, we're all air. And I think it's going to be a good game."

Xavier offensive lineman Ben Helms agreed with Hanna from the northeast side of town.

"It should be an exciting game. Prairie is a good team," said Helms. "I have nothing but the most respect for those guys over there. We're just trying to get better, every day.

"We're just trying to stay low and let Cal run the ball and let Reggie throw the ball when he needs to. Our receivers are making some great catches and Reggie has been throwing some good balls. It's been fun so far."

Morrissey is impressed with Schulte at quarterback.

"He's good. He's very good," said Morrissey. "He does a lot of things very well. He does a good job of hiding the ball in the play-action and finding guys who are open."

Xavier hasn't been challenged in its first two games, but that could change Friday night when they face the Hawks.

"They're very athletic and it looks like they're well-coached in what they're trying to do," said Coach Duane Schulte. "They're 2-and-0 and look pretty good."

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Coach Schulte has studied Hanna on tape and is impressed, especially with his performance against Kennedy.

"They say you get better from Week 1 to Week 2 and Prairie certainly did," he said. "It looks like he's on track with his receivers and he did a nice job."