

Miller has big shoes to fill with Saints

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The Xavier Saints list Brendan Miller at 5-foot-7, but that might be a stretch.

"The physical says 5-foot-6," he said Thursday with a smile, "but maybe with some cleats on 5-7."

Regardless of his actual size, Miller has big shoes to fill as he replaces Cal Stovie as Xavier's starting tailback for Friday night's home game against Dubuque Wahlert (1-2).

Stovie suffered a torn ACL in his knee last Friday against Prairie and has been lost for the season after rushing for 488 yards in three games.

"I feel really bad for Cal. We all do," said Miller, a junior. "We're just trying to do our job and fill his shoes and try to do our best to help the team."

Nick Steingreaber, who finished seventh in the 100-meter dash at the Class 4A state track meet last May, also figures to get some carries at tailback. Wes Gardner has climbed the depth chart in the backfield as well.

Miller helped the Xavier sophomore team finish with a 9-0 record last year. He's carried the ball 10 times for 40 yards this season.

"I'm just excited to be on the field," he said. "I just love to compete and I want to do anything I can to help the team."

Miller said he's not as fast as Stovie, but tries to capitalize on his ability to make moves on the field.

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"We hope he can step in," Coach Duane Schulte said. "Cal's had a great year, so it's going to be hard to duplicate exactly what he's done. But we think Brendan is a pretty good little back himself, so hopefully he can step in and do that."

Stovie also excelled for the No. 6 Saints (3-0) as a punt returner and receiver, so he'll be missed in a lot of ways. Stovie is scheduled for knee surgery next week, but he came to practice all week to help his club as much as possible.

"Even when Cal was healthy, he was giving me advice, giving me help, just to prepare me for whenever," Miller said. "He says I have to be ready for these things. He's here helping me out with everything."

Steingreaber has been getting some extra help from his classmate as well.

"Cal's a great leader," Steingreaber said. "We're pretty good friends. Now that he's on the sideline, he's been coaching me up every play. He'll tell us what we need to work on and help us out a lot."

Steingreaber has carried the ball twice for nine yards this season.

"We feel really bad for Cal," he said. "We're just going to try and step up and do his job and help the team the best way we can."

Stovie got hurt after making a 55-yard run in the third quarter against Prairie. He thought he'd be all right, but the injury was more severe than he imagined.

"We were all surprised," said Steingreaber. "He got up one minute after the play happened and said he'd be fine, so we just took his word for it."

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"He worked so hard in the offseason. He's a great leader, so it's a real shame."

Coach Schulte does not plan any drastic changes in Xavier's attack. The Saints have featured a balanced attack, with quarterback Reggie Schulte throwing the ball accurately and Stovie doing most of the running. Now somebody else will carry the ball.

"Like Popeye used to say, 'I am who I am,'" Coach Schulte remarked. "We'll just do what we do."

Reggie Schulte has completed 30 of 39 passes (76.9 percent) for 451 yards and 10 touchdowns, with just one interception. The Saints have excelled on offense, defense and special teams this season during their fast start.

"We're just trying to take it one step at a time. Get better every day," Coach Schulte said. "Same old stuff."

Stovie is not the only Saint facing knee surgery. Austin Gloede, a 6-4, 240-pound defensive lineman, hurt his knee against Jefferson Aug. 30 and is scheduled for surgery later this month.

Xavier will honor the 1982 LaSalle High School football team that won the Class 2A state title 30 years ago at Friday night's game. Tom Kopatich, who coached LaSalle to the title, plans to attend and will be saluted.