

## Persick helps boot Saints to semifinals

Written by Jim Ecker

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Ryan Persick has been kicking a ball for as long as he can remember, but it was always a soccer ball.

Football came later.

"I think it was my freshman year," he said Monday. "They needed a kicker, so I came out. And I was pretty good."

Actually, "pretty good" is putting it mildly.

Persick, a 165-pound junior, has broken three records at Xavier High School this season and ranks among the Class 4A leaders in three departments.

He kicked two clutch field goals in a 28-7 victory over Prairie last Friday to help the third-ranked Saints reach the semifinals of the Class 4A playoffs.

Xavier (12-0) will face Cedar Falls (11-1) at 7:06 p.m. Friday night in the UNI-Dome.

Persick booted a 46-yard field goal in the second quarter against Prairie to snap a 7-7 tie. "It was a pretty special moment right there," he said. "It changed the momentum a little bit."

Persick also delivered a 38-yarder to give the Saints a 13-7 edge in the third quarter and kicked two extra points in the game.

"He's been a real valuable contributor," Xavier Coach Duane Schulte said Monday before practice. "We've found over the years, when you have a good kicker it helps in a lot of things."

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Persick has kicked 63 PATs this season, giving him two school records for the price of one. He's broken the single-season mark of 49 PATs set by Joe Bedard when Xavier won the Class 4A state title in 2006 and he's also snapped the career mark of 59 PATs set by Chad Gilmer in 2010 and 2011.

Persick is 7-for-10 on field goals this year and has scored a total of 84 points, topping the school record for most points in one season by a kicker. The old mark was 73 points by Bedard in 2006.

Persick ranks second in the state in Class 4A in most PATs (63 of 65), he's tied for third in kickoff yards (4,087 yards on 80 kickoffs for a 51.1 average) and he's tied for fourth in most field goals (7).

"It's gone pretty good," he said modestly. "We can improve on things."

Persick credited Drew Scott, the snapper on field goals and PATs, and Corbin Woods, who holds for all the kicks. He said they practice "quite a bit" as a unit.

Persick grew up with soccer and plays at Xavier, but it's no longer his favorite sport.

"I like football a little more than soccer," he said. "It's a little more of a team sport. More disciplined."

Xavier defeated Cedar Falls, 24-7, during the regular season, but the Saints expect a stiff challenge and a close game in the semifinals Friday night in the rematch. In fact, it could come down to a field goal.

Persick smiled at the thought.

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"I'm trying not to think about that game now," he said.