

Charles City spikes Saints at state tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Charles City Comets are ranked No. 1 in the state for a very good reason.

They have a superstar with Jesse Sindlinger, a quick-hitting offense and a bunch of girls who unleash wicked jump serves that are hard to return.

The Xavier Saints got an eyeful Wednesday night.

Sindlinger collected 24 kills as the Comets whipped the ninth-ranked Saints, 25-18, 25-17, 20-25, 25-17 in the opening round of the Class 4A state volleyball tournament at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

Sindlinger is perhaps best known for winning three state golf titles in a row, earning her a scholarship to the University of Iowa, but she's also an accomplished volleyball player with a ferocious shot at the net.

"She's a very strong player. She's a very aggressive player. She doesn't give up on the ball," Xavier Coach Barb Sullivan remarked. "You have to have a lot of respect for a player like that."

Charles City (43-1) has lost only one match all season and had lost only five sets all season coming into the tournament. The Comets posted 39 shutouts this season and came into the state meet with a string of 11 straight shutouts.

It wasn't much consolation, but at least Xavier won a set. "Well, you feel a little bit better," senior Sarah Homan said.

Charles City dominated the first two games and rarely gave the Saints (26-12) room to breathe. The Comets blocked many of Xavier's best shots at the net or were able to dig them safely and keep the ball alive for a kill of their own.

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"They're a good team. We knew that coming in," said junior Kasey VandenBosch, who led Xavier with 12 kills. "Obviously their record speaks for itself. We played our hardest. It didn't work out for us."

The Saints got untracked in the third game with VandenBosch leading the way. Kelsey Boyer served an ace to finish the set, giving the Saints momentary hope for a big comeback. Their hopes were quickly dashed in the fourth set.

"They're pretty tough, but I thought at the beginning we were kind of shaky," Homan said. "Once we settled in we started playing more of our game."

Unfortunately for Xavier, the fourth set was similar to the first two and the Saints' season came to an end on the southwest side of Cedar Rapids.

"They were running a quick offense. We were just a step behind," VandenBosch said, "and when we finally got it going it was a little too late."

"The first two games they were running everything as quick as they could and we just couldn't handle it, but the third game we battled. In the fourth game we were one step behind again."

Charles City advanced to the semifinals on Friday.

"They're good. Absolutely," Sullivan said. "They're a very solid team, they're a quick team. We just didn't connect as we would have liked to."

Charles City defeated Class 5A schools like Iowa City West, Dowling and Washington during the season and had too much for the Saints to handle. Their only loss this season was to Dike-New Hartford, a Class 2A powerhouse.

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Xavier accepted a handsome plaque for reaching the state tournament for the third time in four years. There were a few tears, but not too many.

"There's nothing for them to be upset about," Sullivan said. "That's kind of the point that we made over and over (after the match). The seniors put their entire heart and soul into this team."

Sullivan said the juniors and sophomores helped give the Saints a "dynamic mix" this year. "We have to celebrate the fact that we had this time together," she said.

Homan collected 28 assists and finished her final campaign with 1,004 assists, which leads Class 4A.

Kayla Torson, who led the Saints in kills this season, was kept in check most of the match by Charles City. She finished with nine kills.