

These Xavier gridders have spotless 30-0 record

Written by Jim Ecker

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Daniel Vega, Sean Ickes and Logan Clarahan have never lost a football game during their entire Xavier High School careers.

Never. Ever.

Their freshman team compiled a perfect 9-0 record in 2010.

Their sophomore team finished with an unblemished 9-0 mark in 2011.

Now that they've reached the varsity as juniors, the Saints have a glittering 12-0 record heading into the semifinals of the Class 4A playoffs against Cedar Falls Friday at 7:06 p.m. in the UNI-Dome.

Add it up.

Thirty games. Thirty victories.

If the Saints defeat Cedar Falls, these juniors will be 31-0 and playing for the Class 4A title next Friday against Ankeny or Southeast Polk.

Vega, Ickes and Clarahan know the record and don't want to jinx it. But yes, they did think something like this was possible.

"Clear back in elementary school we were always talking about how everything would go in high school," said Vega, a 6-foot-3, 235-pound linebacker. "We didn't really know at the time, until it actually happens."

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Now it's actually happened.

"Yeah, there was always that talk, but now it's actually the time to do it," said Ickes, another member of Xavier's stingy defensive unit. "We've been talking about this for awhile and now it's actually how it came out so far."

"So far" are the operative words. Nobody will be celebrating Friday night if the juniors finish their third year at Xavier with a 30-1 record.

The Saints are not braggarts. Even if they wanted to be, Coach Duane Schulte would not allow it. Nonetheless, the juniors have thought for a long time that they might have successful high school careers.

"It's been a dream of mine," said Clarahan, a 180-pound linebacker.

They've talked about being 30-0. Better yet, they'd love to finish the season 32-0. That would mean a nice big trophy that says "Class 4A State Champions."

Two more games to go.

"We bat it around a little bit," Clarahan confessed.

Thirty games. Thirty victories.

"It's awesome, honestly," Vega remarked. "Everybody is enjoying it. It's really good."

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The Saints fully embrace the "one game at a time" mentality that's espoused by their coaches on a daily basis. One play at a time. One game at a time.

Cedar Falls has their full attention, even though the Saints whipped the Tigers 24-7 during the regular season at the UNI-Dome.

"It's going to be a pretty rough game, I think," Clarahan remarked. "Cedar Falls is going to come at us pretty hard."

For the record, not every member of Xavier's junior class has a 30-0 record. Some of them were promoted to the varsity as sophomores for the playoffs last year and played in a first-round loss to Pleasant Valley, so technically that counts against their ledger.

For the most part, however, they are 30-0.

"It just comes from practicing hard every day and the mentality we have, to come to work every day," Ickes said.

"They just lost the game of football," Schulte said.

Vega, Ickes and Clarahan all start on defense for the Saints. In fact, the Saints start seven juniors on a defensive unit that ranks among the best in the state. Nobody has scored more than 14 points against them in a game all year.

Xavier also starts four juniors on offense, which means exactly half the starters on a 12-0 ballclub - 11 out of 22 - are in the 11th grade. It's a relatively young team, especially for an unbeaten team that has reached the semifinals of the state playoffs.

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It bodes well for the future, but don't bother asking Coach Schulte about 2013.

"I'm not going to say anything about next year," he remarked. "We have a huge opponent Friday."

Cedar Falls has changed quarterbacks since it faced the Saints on Oct. 12. Brian Cook has replaced Brayden Longnecker, giving the Tigers a better passer and moving Longnecker to wide receiver, where he's a threat.

Cedar Falls has a potent running game with Jake Buck (1,313 yards), Nick Clark (696 yards) and Eli Berregaard (647). The three of them have combined for 2,656 yards and 28 touchdowns on the ground, and now the Saints have to worry about their passer as well.

"I think they're trying to throw a little more. But they haven't abandoned the run, that's for sure," Schulte observed. "They're good and fast and tough kids."

The Saints have plenty of good, fast, tough kids themselves.

Reggie Schulte has completed 72.8 percent of his passes for 2,183 yards and 35 touchdowns to rank among the top quarterbacks in the state. He's been intercepted only five times in 180 attempts.

Corbin Woods has caught 52 passes for 1,017 yards and 14 touchdowns. Brendan Miller has rushed for 791 yards and eight touchdowns. Wes Gardner sparked the Saints in their 28-7 victory over Prairie last week with 173 yards and two touchdowns and had a good game against Cedar Falls in the first meeting.

Ankeny will play Southeast Polk in the other Class 4A semifinal at 4:06 p.m. Friday, followed by

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the Saints against the Tigers.

"I'm looking forward to it," Ickes said. "It should be fun."