

Xavier stuffs Cedar Falls in semifinals, 27-6

Written by Jim Ecker

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CEDAR FALLS - Duane Schulte and the Xavier Saints have won 99 football games since the school opened 15 years ago on the northeast side of Cedar Rapids.

If they win their 100th game next Friday, they'll be the Class 4A state champions for the second time in six years.

The third-ranked Saints used big plays and a smothering defense to subdue No. 7 Cedar Falls, 27-6, Friday night before more than 2,000 of their loyal fans who made the trip to the UNI-Dome.

Xavier (13-0) will try to play giant-killer when it faces top-ranked Ankeny (13-0) for the state title in the UNI-Dome next Friday. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:06 p.m.

Ankeny is the second-largest high school in Iowa and has three times as many students as Xavier, which ranks 48th in enrollment. Both teams can put only 11 players on the field at one time, however.

"It's David versus Goliath," Schulte remarked. "We'll show up and try to play."

Cedar Falls smacked the Saints in the face when Jake Buck raced 80 yards for a touchdown on the first play of the game for a 6-0 lead. The contest was just 13 seconds old, but it didn't seem to bother the Saints a great deal. The rest of the night belonged to them.

"You have to forget that kind of stuff," said Xavier linebacker Craig Murtha, one of many Saints who starred on defense the rest of the game. "You just have to put it behind you and keep moving forward."

The Saints did not score in the first period and began the second quarter with two straight

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penalties, giving them a 2nd-and-28 predicament at the Cedar Falls 43-yard line. That's when neighborhood pals Reggie Schulte and Corbin Woods cooked up a little magic.

Schulte lofted a long pass down the east sideline that appeared to almost graze the UNI-Dome roof as Woods raced toward the end zone. After what seemed like an eternity, the ball nestled softly in Woods' hands in the end zone for a touchdown and a 6-6 tie.

Woods beat two defensive backs on the play for a touchdown that got the Saints headed in the right direction.

"Basically I just ran down the field and Reggie gave me one up in the air," said Woods, who has caught passes for more than 1,000 yards this season. "It was a great pass by Reggie and the line did a phenomenal job of blocking up front."

Woods has caught 15 touchdown passes this season, all from Schulte. "It was a big spark for us," the senior quarterback said.

There were many other big sparks to come.

The Saints were clinging to a 10-6 lead in the third quarter when they got the biggest spark of the night on a controversial play. It began with the Saints stuck at their own 5-yard line after a 67-yard punt by Cedar Falls senior Michael Kuntz.

Schulte lofted another long pass, this one toward Nick Steingreaber, and what happened after that is open to debate, especially by Cedar Falls.

To the naked eye, it appeared that Steingreaber gave Cedar Falls defensive back Jacob Newton a shove just before the ball arrived to create a little separation. Steingreaber caught the ball near midfield and raced into the end zone, but an official threw a flag on the play and it appeared the call might be offensive pass interference against Steingreaber.

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It took a few moments, but the official said it was defensive pass interference and the Saints could keep their 95-yard touchdown and their 16-6 lead. Cedar Falls was not happy with the ruling and drew a personal foul.

Steingreaber said he doesn't know if he pushed Newton or not. "I don't really remember," he said. "It happened so fast."

"All I know is that we scored a touchdown," Duane Schulte remarked with a tight smile.

"That's why we don't have instant replay here," Reggie Schulte chipped in. "He did a great job running down the sideline. Heckuva play. Heckuva job by him."

Persick kicked a 25-yard field goal to give Xavier a 20-6 advantage late in the third quarter. It was his second field goal of the game and gave him nine for the season, giving the uncanny junior another school record.

It stayed 20-6 until midway through the fourth quarter as Xavier's defense stuffed the Tigers on play after play. Then came the backbreaker.

Cedar Falls quarterback Brian Cook, who had a miserable night against the Saints, dropped back to pass and almost immediately had Xavier linebacker Logan Clarahan in his face. Clarahan was about to sack Cook for a big loss, but Cook unwisely tried to throw the ball away as he was being spun around.

The ball flopped in the air and came right to Xavier junior Hunter Baldus, who caught the ball at the 6-yard line and strolled into the end zone for the easiest six points of his life.

"Logan hit him and I was right there, so I caught it," Baldus said with a big grin. "I just saw it

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and grabbed it and then I saw the end zone."

Persick added the PAT and the Saints had a fat 27-6 lead with 5:21 left to play.

Cook finished 1-for-6 in the passing department with four interceptions with two by Trey Sampson, one by Baldus and one by Quinton Scholer. Cedar Falls used three different quarterbacks and four different Tigers attempted a pass, but collectively they went 1-for-10 for 27 yards.

All told, Cedar Falls collected only 218 yards in the ballgame. And remember, the Tigers got 80 of those yards on the first play from scrimmage. All their other plays netted a grand total of 138 yards.

Xavier began the game as the stingiest Class 4A outfit in the state, allowing only 7.67 points per game. That number dipped a little more Friday.

Schulte did not have to throw the ball a lot for the Saints, mostly because Brendan Miller dashed for 158 yards on 28 carries with darting moves through the Tigers. Schulte completed 6 of 9 passes for 189 yards, with most of the damage coming on the two long touchdown passes to Woods and Steingreaber.

Cedar Falls lost only two games this season, but both of them were to Xavier and both came on the Tigers' home field in the UNI-Dome, the first time 24-7 and this time 27-6.

Duane Schulte raised his record to 99-56 in 15 years at Xavier. He's the only head football coach the Saints have ever had, and if he gets No. 100 next Friday against the Ankeny Hawks he'll have two state titles in his back pocket and a place in state history. Xavier was the Class 4A state champion in 2006 and is seeking another.

"I can't even think about that," Schulte said. "We have to prepare for them and respect them."

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We're just trying to get these guys on the bus and get home tonight."

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