

Ya gotta believe! Saints whip Lions

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 26 January 2016 23:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 27 January 2016 09:35



If you did not believe in the Xavier Saints before they played at Linn-Mar on Tuesday night, it's time to start.

The Saints put on a sterling performance and whipped the Lions for the third straight year at Linn-Mar, this time 68-63 in the Metro Game of the Year so far.

Xavier is ranked No. 2 in Class 3A by the Associated Press and Linn-Mar is ranked No. 6 in Class 4A, but this game belonged to the gritty Saints who have taken dead aim on the first Mississippi Valley Conference title in school history.

"It's a quality win," Xavier coach Ryan Luehrsmann said. "Anytime you beat a program that's as strong as they are -- and well-coached -- you have to feel good about it.

"I'm really happy with our kids. They just stuck together, showed some toughness and battled it out. That's what you have to do on the road in the MVC."

Xavier trailed 54-49 with less than four minutes remaining, but the Saints went on an 8-0 run and outscored the Lions 19-9 coming down the stretch to emerge with the victory.

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"It's always the best feeling to win here, because it's such a great rivalry and they're such a good team," said Xavier fireball Mitchell

Burger, who has played a key role in all three of his team's victories at Linn-Mar the last three years.

Matt Mims hit one free throw to give the Saints a 66-63 lead with seven seconds left, but Linn-Mar's chance for a 3-pointer to tie the game vanished when Jordan Bohannon slipped and lost the ball on his way up the court.



Burger made two free throws with three seconds left to ice the victory.

Bohannon leads Class 4A in 3-pointers and is a clutch shooter, but he never made it past the mid-court stripe with the game on the line.

"I would have liked to see what would have happened if he had gotten it past halfcourt," Linn-Mar coach Chris Robertson said. "I'm sure he's going to sleep on that one tonight."

Bohannon scored 26 points, but it was a tough 26 as Burger & Co. limited his touches and limited his open looks.

Bohannon poured in 40 points earlier this season against Prairie when he made nine 3-pointers

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and he scored 37 and 35 in consecutive games last week in victories over Ankeny and Dubuque Wahlert. But Bohannon made only two 3-pointers against Xavier and the Saints kept him off the foul line for the most part, where he's as deadly as they come.

"I thought we worked hard on him," Luehrsmann said. "We made him earn them, and to Jordan's credit he's going to get them. He's a special player.

"I wouldn't be surprised if that kid finds a way to start next year at Iowa. He's playing that well."

Burger had the primary responsibility against Bohannon, despite giving away at least three inches.

"Bo is such a great player," Burger said. "To get a win against a Division I player that's going to Iowa, it feels great.

"I tried to basically slow him down and make him earn everything he got. We know he's going to get his buckets. We tried to limit his buckets as much as we could and make him work for everything he got."

Max Techau gave the Saints a 59-57 lead with a pretty reverse layup with one minute to play. Mims made it 61-57 with a pair of free throws with 37 seconds left, then Mims hit another foul shot for a 62-57 lead with 32 seconds left after he stole the ball from Bohannon.

Jared Printy got fouled on a 3-point shot and made all three free throws for Linn-Mar, pulling the Lions within 62-60 with 28 seconds left. Bohannon fouled Burger with 27 seconds remaining and Burger cashed both shots for a 64-60 edge.

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Bohannon drove for a layup to make it 64-62 with 21 seconds left. It appeared that Printy then made a clean steal against Burger, but Printy was called for a foul and Burger hit one shot to make it 65-62 with 16 seconds to go.

Reese Phillips pulled Linn-Mar within 65-63 with 7.9 seconds remaining. Mims missed his first free throw but swished his second to make it 66-63, then Bohannon slipped and the game was over.

Techau, enjoying a size advantage near the bucket, canned 8 of 11 shots and led the Saints with 21 points. He also grabbed six rebounds.

Burger finished with an impressive stat line with 15 points, eight assists, six steals and three rebounds. Mims contributed 14 points, eight rebounds and three assists. Jackson Joens scored 10 points and Ryan Stulken had eight points as the five starters accounted for all 68 markers.

Printy scored 11 points for Linn-Mar, but nobody else reached double figures.

Linn-Mar played its fourth straight game against a ranked opponent and finished with a 2-2 mark during the rugged stretch. The Lions lost at Iowa City West (No. 3 in Class 4A), won at Ankeny in overtime (No. 8 in 4A), nipped Dubuque Wahlert (No. 3 in Class 3A) and lost to Xavier (No. 2 in 3A).

"It's been a grind," Robertson said.

"We were a little off tonight mentally, and that's disappointing," he said. "We have to get better. We weren't good enough to win tonight and didn't deserve to."

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Xavier raised its records to 12-2 overall and 8-1 in the Mississippi Valley Conference. The Saints have a two-game lead over Iowa City High (6-3) in the Mississippi Division of the MVC as they seek the first league title in school history.

"That was one of the main goals from the beginning of the season," Burger said. "Hopefully we can accomplish that and win the division and hang a banner up at Xavier."

The Saints finished third at the Class 3A state tournament last year and would relish another trip to Des Moines.

"If we play as well as we've been playing, I have no doubt that we could make a run at state," said Burger. "I'm happy with our team right now."

Xavier lost four starters to graduation from last year's club, but Burger has been joined by four new starters and the Saints are clicking again.

Techau, a 6-foot-7 transfer from Kennedy, has been a key addition and leads the Saints in scoring.

Techau has made a smooth transition to his new school and new team.

"It's been great. It's actually been really awesome," he said. "I love all my teammates and I love the Xavier community."

Linn-Mar fell to 9-4 overall and 7-2 in the Valley Division of the MVC.

Bohannon moved into ninth place in career scoring in the Metro with 1,313 points.

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XAVIER (68): Burger 4 5-6 15, Mims 4 5-9 14, Butkowski 0 0-0 0, Joens 4 0-0 10, Stulken 3 0-0 8, Houtakker 0 0-0 0, Techau 8 5-7 21. Totals 23 15-22 68.

LINN-MAR (63): Printy 3 4-5 11, Murphy 4 0-0 9, Phillips 2 1-2 5, Bohannon 11 2-2 26, Klostermann 3 0-0 6, Voves 0 0-0 0, Brandt 2 0-0 6. Totals 25 7-9 63.

Halftime - Linn-Mar 27, Xavier 26. 3-point goals - Xavier 7 (Burger 2, Joens 2, Stulken 2, Mims 1), Linn-Mar 6 (Bohannon 2, Brandt 2, Printy 1, Murphy 1).