

Xavier girls dump Waterloo West

Written by Jim Ecker

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If you watch the Xavier girls basketball team play a few games in a row, you realize the Saints play really good defense.

They did it again Tuesday night.

The Saints pestered Waterloo West with their long arms and quick feet and topped the Wahawks, 49-29, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Ron Thillen Gymnasium.

Waterloo West (3-3) averaged 56.8 points in its first five games and star guard Aliyah Robinson was getting 18.8 per contest, but the Saints followed their defensive game plan to perfection.

Xavier prevented Robinson from driving to the basket and gave the visitors very few second-chance opportunities.

"We play a lot of help defense, especially at practice, and helping the helper," explained senior Lexi Noonan, who led the Saints with 13 points and was a force on defense. "We all help each other out and make sure everyone is covered and we don't leave their best player open."

Na'Tracia Ceasar, who was averaging 16.8 points, collected only seven points against the stingy Saints, who had a good scouting report on the visitors from Waterloo.

"We've seen these kids from Waterloo West forever. They've been playing varsity for three or

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four years," said Xavier Coach Tom Lilly, who has matched wits with Waterloo West Coach Tony Pappas for a long time. "We've got to get kids who are willing to get down in a stance and move some feet."

Xavier played a strong game on defense last Friday night in a 42-37 victory over Linn-Mar, which is ranked No. 11 in Class 5A, and the Saints came back four days later and played well on defense again.

The Saints (4-3) led by only three points, 26-23, entering the fourth period, but they drilled the Wahawks 23-6 in the final eight minutes for the final 20-point margin.

Freshman Caitlynn Daniels began the fourth period with two free throws for Xavier, then Noonan hit a layup to make it 30-23.

Noonan cashed a pair of free throws, Kiana Stanek drained a 3-pointer and Amelia Ivester made a basket with a slick feed from Daniels and suddenly the Saints owned a 13-point bulge at 37-24.

Stanek swished another 3-pointer to make it 42-28 and Kylie Brown hit two foul shots to make it 44-28 with 1:36 left and the Saints were home free.

Stanek hit three triples in the second half and scored all 11 of her points in the third and fourth quarters, with all three of her 3-pointers coming at critical times.

"Kiana Stanek hit some big 3's when we needed it," said Lilly. "That was the start of the separation, I think."

Noonan, who helped the Xavier volleyball team reach the semifinals of the state tournament last month, thinks the basketball team is capable of big things as well. The Saints have lost three games this season, but all three were competitive games against ranked Class 5A clubs.

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Xavier will compete at the Class 4A level in the postseason tournament and Noonan likes their chances.

"The limit is endless," she remarked. "I expect us to make a run at state and possibly be in the state championship. I think our team is capable of anything. We have a lot of versatility and a lot of players that can contribute."

Daniels scored only two points for the Saints, but she did a nice job running the club at point guard and breaking Waterloo West's press. She also had several sparkling assists and blocked three shots.

"She's awesome," said Noonan. "She sees the court so well, especially for being only a freshman. She can contribute offensively and defensively, so I'm really glad we have her this year."

WATERLOO WEST (29): Robinson 4 1-2 9, Young 0 0-0 0, Campbell 2 3-4 7, Conrey 0 0-0 0, Ceaser 2 1-1 5, Phillips 2 1-4 7, Draine 0 1-3 1. Totals 10 7-14 29.

XAVIER (49): Stanek 3 2-2 11, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Daniels 0 2-2 2, Cooling 0 0-0 0, Brown 3 3-4 9, Noonan 5 3-4 13, Steffen 1 0-0 3, Callahan 0 0-0 0, Stovie 1 0-0 2, Ivester 3 1-2 7, Jasper 1 0-0 2. Totals 17 11-14 49.

Halftime - Xavier 17, Waterloo West 12. 3-point goals - Waterloo West 2 (Phillips 2), Xavier 4 (Stanek 3, Steffen 1).