

Saints eye state tourney with Mims

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Xavier Saints came within one game of reaching the Class 3A state basketball tournament last year, falling to Dubuque Wahlert in a memorable substate final in Epworth.

Now the Saints plan to finish the journey to Des Moines with Cedar Rapids Prairie transfer Michael Mims joining Adam McDermott and Calvin Winker in a potent lineup of three all-conference players.

Mims, a 5-foot-9 point guard, averaged 13.7 points at Prairie last season before deciding to play his final year at Xavier. McDermott, who has committed to North Dakota, averaged 16.5 last season. Winker, who has committed to Missouri Western, averaged 13.0 points.

All three players are capable of scoring 20 points on any given night and Coach Ryan Luehrsmann plans to play an up-tempo game to take advantage of their ability.

Luehrsmann claimed he has a new coaching philosophy this year with so much firepower on the club. "Just try to get out of the way," he joked.

The Saints lost most of their size when 6-8 center Matt Nelson graduated and joined the Iowa football team, but Winker (6-5) and McDermott (6-4) are versatile players who can rebound as well as shoot.

Mims is looking forward to having McDermott and Winker on either side of him this year. He played with both of them on the AAU Barnstormers a few years ago and by all accounts has fit right into his new school and new team.

"It was a smooth transition and I like all the guys," he said. "I knew Adam and Calvin pretty well

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already.

"It's nice to know you always have a guy to pass to and someone who can knock down shots," he said. "You don't have any pressure. You can just go out and play. You can just give the ball to anybody who's hot.

"It's a triple threat," he said. "It's hard to stop."

Xavier opens the new season Monday night by hosting Mount Pleasant. Six other Metro teams open Tuesday night.

McDermott and Winker are excited about having Mims on the team.

"It's exciting to think about, because Mims is a great player," said McDermott. "He can shoot, pass and he's a good leader, too. He's the point guard that we needed. He's going to help us a lot."

The Saints finished 15-9 last year, losing to Wahlert 70-62 in the substate finals. Now they've set their sights on Des Moines and the state tournament.

"Definitely," said Winker. "We're going to do everything we can to get there. That's our main goal this year."

McDermott, Winker and Mims are all good outside shooters, which will make it tough for opponents.

"It's nice now with another good scorer and a very good point guard," said Winker. "It helps to distribute the ball even more. He can score, too, which is great. He's a great player."

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"It's going to be tough having matchups against all three of us. It's going to be good having us three on the court at the same time."

Luehrsmann is looking forward to having so much firepower at his disposal this year.

"I'm pretty lucky to have three kids that have a really high IQ and know how to play the right way," he said. "They're very unselfish, so I know that all three of them just want to make the right play that needs to be made at any given time."

Luehrsmann said Conner Ramlo, Joe Welch, Noah Clasen, Tim Otting and freshman Jackson Joens are battling for playing time and spots in the lineup.

Mims transferred to Xavier last spring and had all summer to play with his new teammates and learn the system. "He fit in really well," said Luehrsmann. "All of the kids have embraced him. We expect him to hit the ground running."

Luehrsmann plans to have his team push the ball and play at a fast pace, whenever possible. "That's the style we'd like to play," he remarked.

"Hopefully it will be fun for our fans to watch."

The 2013-14 campaign was not a particularly good season for boys basketball in the Metro area. Only Kennedy (18-6), Xavier (15-9) and Linn-Mar (13-10) finished with winning records and only the Cougars made the state tournament, where they lost in the opening round.

Kennedy graduated A.J. Carter (15.3 points, 5 assists, 4 rebounds), John Bardsley (9.8 points) and Drew Heitland (8.2 points, 5.5 rebounds). Coach Jon McKowen will be regrouping with Cole Murdock (8.9 ppg), Zach Daniels (7.5) and Bryton Heisler (6.8).

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Linn-Mar features sharpshooters Jordan Bohannon (17.6 points) and Nic Uhler (14.9) in the backcourt. They combined for 112 3-pointers last season and Lane Halupnik (8.1) gives them another outside threat.

The Washington Warriors finished 6-17 last season, but the Warriors have talent and are rebuilding with Maurice Arrington (10.6 points, 6.6 rebounds) and sharpshooter Jared Printy (10.6 points).

Stu Ordman resigned after a 7-15 campaign at Jefferson to become the new coach at Iowa City Regina. Brandon Homan, Ordman's top assistant, was promoted to head coach and is building with Tyler Konigsmark (12.3 points) and Lucas Larson (6.7). The J-Hawks lost all-conference guard Jacob Olson (20.7 points) to Kirkwood.

The Marion Indians finished 10-13 last year and graduated Daly Quinn (13.7), Quinn Cannoy (8.5) and Trevor Hardman (5.2). Coach Mike Manderscheid is regrouping with Craig Engle (13.5), Jacob Manderscheid (4.8) and Derek Smith (4.6).

James Moses resigned after a 6-17 campaign at Prairie and was replaced by Jeremy Rickertsen, his top assistant. The Hawks suffered a big loss when Mims transferred to Xavier, but they had a young team last year and return experienced players with Mitch Lorenz (8.4 points), JoJo Simpson (7.2), Jalen Rima (5.0), Coen Brown (4.3), Austin Fisher (4.1), Cal Clark (4.0) and Bryce Meeker.

Cedar Valley Christian suffered through an 0-21 campaign last year and averaged only 26.9 points per game. The young Huskies are a year older and Coach Jeff Pospisil is building with Tom Scroggs (6.1 points) and Travis Geels (5.9).