

Xavier girls push No. 9 Johnston

Written by Jim Ecker

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The people who vote in the girls basketball rankings think Johnston has the No. 9 team in Class 5A as the new season begins.

If those rankings are legitimate, it could be good news for the Xavier Saints once the Class 4A postseason tournament rolls around in February.

The Saints made a couple of serious runs at the ninth-ranked Dragons Saturday before falling short, 47-38, in an early non-conference game at Ron Thillen Gymnasium.

The Saints trailed 27-15 at halftime, but they scored the first nine points of the second half to pull within 27-24 on a basket by Amelia Ivester.

Johnston spurred to another 12-point margin at 39-27 early in the fourth period, but the Saints scored seven straight markers to climb within 39-34 on a basket by Lexi Noonan and later crept within 42-38 on two free throws by Emily Jasper with just 2:17 left to play.

Xavier did not get over the hump, but Coach Tom Lilly liked the way his club kept battling against one of the top Class 5A programs in the state.

"It shows we're not willing to step back and accept the fact that we're getting beat and now we'll get beat by 20," he said. "So you have to be pretty encouraged with that."

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Taryn Knuth, a 6-foot-4 center, was the big difference in the ballgame for Johnston. She scored 23 points and cashed 13 of 14 free throws, giving her nearly half her team's total of 47 points.

"We tried to do some things defensively, but the Knuth kid got too far underneath position and we just let her get the ball where she wanted to," said Lilly.

Both clubs made 13 field goals, but the visitors outscored the Saints 19-8 at the foul line.

Kiana Stanek popped in four 3-points and scored 12 points for Xavier (1-1).

"We had a chance," said Lilly. "We just missed too many opportunities.

"We have to shoot better than 30 percent. You can't beat anybody (at 30 percent), I don't care who you play."

JOHNSTON (47): McDermott 3 3-4 9, Sieren 1 0-2 3, Wilmes 0 0-0 0, Thompson 2 0-2 4, Hodzic 1 0-0 3, Johnson 0 2-4 2, Nesheim 1 1-5 3, Knuth 5 13-14 23. Totals 13 19-31 47.

XAVIER (38): Stanek 4 0-0 12, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Daniels 1 2-2 4, Brown 2 1-2 5, Noonan 3 0-0 6, Callahan 0 0-1 0, Ivester 2 0-0 4, Jasper 1 5-7 7. Totals 13 8-12 38.

Halftime - Johnston 27, Xavier 15. 3-point goals - Johnston 2 (Sieren 1, Hodzic 1), Xavier 4 (Stanek 4).