

## Xavier O-Line paved way for Wilson's record

Written by Jim Ecker

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Maliki Wilson grabbed the headlines last Friday night when he rushed for a school-record 291 yards and scored on three long touchdowns for the Xavier Saints, but he was quick to credit all his blockers for paving the way in a 35-26 victory over Iowa City Regina.

As it turns out, it's a mutual admiration society. Wilson praised his blockers, and the blockers praised Wilson for his big game in the season-opener.

"It's pretty incredible," Xavier center Sam Meyers said this week. "It's easy to block for a running back that can set up his own blocks for us and gets a ton of yards after contact."

Wilson snapped the old school mark of 271 yards set by Brendan Miller against Linn-Mar in 2013. He broke loose for touchdowns that measured 69, 31 and 62 yards against the Regals.

"It's impressive to see what he can do," said Ryan Jasper, who plays right guard on the offensive line. "He sets us up great, but again it all goes back to the scout team. They gave us a great look in practice and we knew what we were doing when we got out there."

Wilson collected his 69-yard touchdown on his first carry in the first quarter and his 62-yard touchdown the last time he touched the ball in the fourth quarter to clinch the victory. All told, he carried the ball 25 times for a healthy 11.6-yard average.

"It's nice to have a back like him running behind us," remarked Max Johnson, who starts at right tackle.

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The Saints have good experience on the offensive line with seniors manning all five spots, but it's not a big O-Line by any stretch of the imagination. Jack High, the left tackle, weighs 235. Jake Guckenberger, the left guard, is 210. Meyers, the man in the middle, is also 210. Jasper checks in at 205 at right guard, with Johnson playing right tackle at 230.

Meyer thought the unit played well against Regina.

"We started off a lot better than I thought we were going to," he said. "We've got some things to improve on, though."

"I thought we did all right," said Johnson. "There's always stuff we can improve on. We've got to work hard this week to keep getting better."

The Saints visit Linn-Mar Friday night.

All told, the Saints rushed for 381 yards against Regina and averaged 8.3 yards per carry. They scored all five of their touchdowns on the ground, with Wilson scoring three times and quarterback Bryce Schulte scoring twice.

"Kudos to Maliki," said Coach Duane Schulte, "but he'll be the first to tell you he didn't do it alone."

Coach Schulte was satisfied with the overall performance of his team, but he's looking for significant improvement from Week 1 to Week 2.

"I'm happy that we got the win, but like every game there's things we need to do better," he said.

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That includes the offensive line.

"It was like every other position," he said. "They had their good moments and their bad moments. They just have to keep getting better."

Coach Schulte noted that tight ends Brett Burns, Devin Lansing and Jacob Hines also played a key role in the blocking scheme against Regina, along with hard-nosed fullback Erik Rodriguez, who rushed for 75 yards.

The Saints stuck mostly to the ground, running the ball 46 times and passing only 10 times. Bryce Schulte, a three-year starter, hit 4 of 10 passes for 40 yards on a quiet night.

"I've stolen that from Hayden Fry years ago: We'll scratch where it itches," said Coach Schulte. "That's kind of how the game played out."

The victory over Regina vaulted Xavier into the No. 1 spot in Class 3A in the first Associated Press rankings of the season this week.

"We're obviously grateful that we're No. 1, but we're obviously going to keep working," said Meyers. "We've got great opponents in our district."

"It's great, but I don't like to look at it too much," said Jasper of the top billing in 3A. "We've still got a lot of work to do and some really tough opponents."

Being ranked No. 1 is nice, for now.

"It doesn't mean anything until the end of the year," said Coach Schulte. "So we'll play it out and see what happens."

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The Saints will begin district competition next Friday, Sept. 9 at Benton Community.

Linn-Mar enters this Friday's game with an 0-1 record following a 26-6 loss to Iowa City High.