

## Saints sweep into 4A regional finals

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 26 October 2016 04:55 -

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The Xavier High School volleyball team has been working since August to reach the Class 4A state tournament at the U.S. Cellular Center next month.

Now they are only one step away.

The sixth-ranked Saints swept Fort Madison, 25-17, 25-23, 25-16, in the regional semifinals at Ron Thillen Gymnasium Tuesday night.

Xavier (30-9) will host eighth-ranked Clinton (22-13) in the regional finals Monday night, with the winner earning a trip to downtown Cedar Rapids for the state meet.

The Saints should be filled with confidence when they face Clinton. They whipped the River Queens in two matches at the North Scott tournament Sept. 10, winning both contests 2-0 by a combined count of 92-57.

The Saints will be confident, but not over-confident.

"They have something in the back of their heads, but they know it's not promised," said Xavier Coach Austin Filer. "They have to work hard for it."

In fact, the Saints had to work hard against Fort Madison before pulling out a victory in straight

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sets. The Bloodhounds led 23-21 late in the second set, but the Saints rallied and won the last four points for a 25-23 victory and a 2-0 lead.

Filer appeared to stay calm in the second set, even when his club trailed 10-5 early.

"I think that's every coach's dream, to feel comfortable on the bench," he remarked. "I just felt like my team was going to find a way to pull it out. They've done it all year."

The third set was tied, 7-7, when Anna Parr stepped to the service line for Xavier and helped her team rattle off 11 straight points for a commanding 18-7 advantage. Parr put the ball in play with 11 effective serves and her teammates did the rest.



The Saints have struggled at the service line at times this season, but Parr was right on the money. "Just stay calm and confident and it will go your way," she said about her approach.

Ellie McDermott led the Saints in the first set with six kills, then Charlotte Richards took over with eight kills in the second set. Richards, McDermott and Lexi Noonan combined for 16 big kills in the third set to put the match away.

Now with one more victory, the Saints will go marching to downtown Cedar Rapids in two weeks. "That's been our goal all year," said Parr.

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The Saints have tinkered with their offense in recent days and have been mixing a 6-2 offense with a 5-1, looking for different combinations that might work against different opponents. At times, it means less playing time for a few Saints.

"The good thing is, everyone is buying in. Nobody is thinking about themselves," said Filer. "When it's not somebody's turn that day, it's on to the next day and they know it could be their day tomorrow.

"I love the direction this team is headed, I love the chemistry that they have, I love the effort."

Richards finished the match with 21 kills and 20 digs. Jess Callahan collected 31 assists. Parr was 20-for-20 with her serves.