

Saints surge past Linn-Mar girls

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Try as she might, Linn-Mar's Mykaela Brandt could not beat the Xavier girls Friday.

She came close, single-handedly bringing her team back from a runaway to within three points late in the third quarter.

But then the music died for the visiting Lions.

The Saints marched off a 20-2 run over a seven-minute period, waltzing down the stretch to a 52-37 victory.

The game between Mississippi Valley Conference opponents did not count in the league standings.

"Mykaela scraps every game," said Linn-Mar Coach Michael Brandt of his sparkplug senior point guard, who also happens to be his daughter. "I like her demeanor on the floor. She always tries to do what she can to win. She's never going to back down."

By taking advantage of a bevy of Lion turnovers all night and by dominating the backboards, No.6 Xavier (9-6) seemed poised to coast home when it mounted a 30-17 lead midway through the third quarter.

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That's when he younger Brandt took over. She'd been mostly driving and dishing to teammates up to that point.

But in a span of less than two minutes, she scored nine straight points. Four of them came as she willed her way down the crowded lane for layups and three more came on a long, long 3-pointer.

Brandt, who led all scorers with 17, capped her furious one-girl rally with two free throws.

Then came a few more loose balls for the Lions (6-9) and the end of a comeback bid.

"They got a couple of easy baskets, and they broke out on us," said Brandt the senior. "That kind of turned the tide."

At one point in their resurgence, the Saints scored 13 points in a row.



"When they got it down to three points, it was good that we held onto our poise," said Xavier Coach Tom Lilly. "We could have folded."

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"Instead, we got some big steals and some easy fast break baskets. That was a learning opportunity for our team."

Seniors Kayla Armstrong and Sarah Dickes did much of the damage when it counted, the former by swiping Linn-Mar passes and the latter by feeding shooters.

Armstrong had seven steals on the night. Dickes, who also scored 10 points, dished off twice to Hayley Deutmeyer for scores during the stretch run.

"I was looking for the open shot," said Deutmeyer, who scored six of her 12 points in the fourth quarter. "My teammates did a good job getting me the ball."

She and big center Ashley Stulken, the high Saints' scorer with 13, were also beasts on the boards all night.

"Everybody did a real good job boxing out," said Deutmeyer, an athletic 5-foot-8 jumping jack.

"They put up too many easy buckets with offensive rebounds," said Michael Brandt. "We were shooting badly, and we had too many turnovers."

"Xavier is always a great defensive team. You have to execute to win against them. And we just had too many wasted possessions when we got no looks at the basket."

While his team is tied atop the MVC Valley division standings, the ever-cautious Lilly said the Saints still have a rough road ahead. They play at co-leader Prairie next Tuesday, and five of their final six games are away from home.

"We're going to be like the Traveling Wilburys," he said. "Our musical troupe will be on the

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road..

“It may not be good for our conference standings, but we’ll be getting battle-tested for the (end-of-season) tournament.”

LINN-MAR (37): Hannah Yearling 1 0-0 2, Mykaela Brandt 6 3-4 17, Sara Strauel 1 0-2 2, Courtney Major 2 1-2 6, Alexis Libenguth 1 0-0 2, Jenna Harms 2 3-4 8, Aryn Jones 0 0-0 0, Taylor Robertson 0 0-0 0, Michal Christopher 0 0-0 0, Kristen Eiles 0 0-0 0, Emily Makinster 0 0-0 0, Anna Foley 0 0-0 0. Totals 13 7-12 37.

XAVIER (52): Kayla Armstrong 0 3-4 3, Hayley Deutmeyer 4 3-4 12, Sarah Dickes 2 5-6 10, Maddie Bertsch 2 0-0 4, Ashley Stulken 4 5-9 13, Morgan Breitbach 1 0-1 2, McKenna Andersen 3 1-1 7, Abby Watson 0 1-2 1, Allison Chorzempa 0 0-0 0, Hannah Chute 0 0-0 0, Lizzy Bailey 0 0-0 0, Jenny Dickes 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 18-27 52.

Halftime – Xavier 23, Linn-Mar 15. 3-point goals – Linn-Mar 4 (Brandt 2, Harms, Major), Xavier 2 (S. Dickes, Deutmeyer). Total fouls – Linn-Mar 24, Xavier 14. Fouled out – none.