

Saints have big sneakers to fill

Written by Jim Ecker

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Adam McDermott, Calvin Winker and Michael Mims helped the Xavier Saints win 18 games last season and place third at the Class 3A state basketball tournament, but now all three of them are playing ball in college.

McDermott scored 17 points and hit five 3-pointers the other day for North Dakota in a victory against Bowling Green. Winker is playing as a freshman at Missouri Western. And Mims has started a game already at Loras.

Connor Ramlo, a fourth member of the starting lineup for the Saints last year, is a member of the men's soccer team at Creighton, leaving Xavier Coach Ryan Luehrsmann with a rebuilding job this year.

He welcomes the challenge.

"We're trying to figure out how we're going to replace the four senior starters that moved on," Luehrsmann said this week. "We've got some young talent and this group is real competitive."

"They're really getting after one another in practice, so I like what I've seen so far in terms of effort and their coachability."

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Mitchell Burger, the fifth member of the starting lineup, is back for his senior year after enjoying an impressive campaign with the Saints in their backcourt. He averaged 13.5 points, the second-best on the club behind McDermott, and impressed fans with his speed, agility and fierce desire.

"He's such an explosive guard," said Luehrsmann. "He really surprises people with his speed.

"He's got a different gear than most people have. And he's a very intense, competitive kid. He likes challenges and he seems to play his best in the biggest games."

Luehrsmann thinks Burger can have even more success this season as a senior.

"Mitchell had a terrific summer for us and has continued that here at the start of practice," the coach said. "He'll certainly be the catalyst for us and kind of ignite things and make things go."

Sophomores Matt Mims and Jackson Joens, senior Ryan Stulken and Kennedy transfer Max Techau were in the tentative starting lineup along with Burger this week as the Saints continued preparations for the season opener at Mount Pleasant Monday night.

Joens appeared in eight games for the Saints last season as a freshman and Mims dressed for a few games, but now both of them are expected to fill big roles this year as 10th graders.

"They've really stepped up their game," said Luehrsmann. "Both of them are gym rats.

"I liken it to when we had Winker and McDermott a few years ago when we moved them up as sophomores. They're very similar to those two kids in how they approach it and how they're willing to get in the gym and work on it.

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"Both Matt and Jackson are going to have to perform at a high level for us to be competitive in the MVC."

Stulken, 6-foot-5, appeared in 19 games last season for the Saints and scored 18 points, but now he's got a chance to make a name for himself as a senior. Techau, 6-foot-6, averaged 3.3 points and 2.0 rebounds at Kennedy last year as a sophomore and is a welcome addition at Xavier.

"I like the fact that Max has a great motor and plays with all-out effort and intensity throughout the game," said Luehrsmann. "He's been terrific on the boards for us and has shown the ability to finish in the lane pretty well also."

"He just gives us a little more length, with Stulken, to be able to defend people and he also has the ability to step outside and stretch the floor like Ryan does as well."

Luehrsmann said he's excited to begin playing games to see how things fit together.

"We've got a brand-new team and I'm not sure what we've got right now," he remarked. "I'm eager to see exactly where we stack up."

"We definitely have some talent and have some pieces that could develop, I think, and be pretty formidable by the end of the year."