

Schmitt leads Prairie by Saints

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Prairie girls basketball team began its warmups for Friday night's game at Xavier with only eight players on the floor and with a 2-8 record.

At the other end of the floor, the Saints had a full complement of players with a flashy No. 7 ranking in the Class 4A poll and an impressive five-game winning streak.

Advantage Saints, right?

Not this time.

Sarah Schmitt was hot from the foul line and pumped in 22 points as the young Prairie Hawks upended the Saints, 52-45, in a Mississippi Valley Conference game at Ron Thillen Gymnasium.

Prairie had two freshmen and two sophomores in the starting lineup, but the Hawks withstood a Xavier rally in the second half and were the more composed team at the end.

"Our kids played above what their grades may show," said Prairie Coach Josh Bentley. "They stayed together. And they executed and stayed disciplined."

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Schmitt, a 5-foot-7 sophomore, swished 10 of 11 free throws for the Hawks, including six straight in the final 56 seconds to help Prairie notch the victory.

"We worked really hard over the break and we really worked hard on our defense," said Schmitt. "And we scouted them really well."

Jenna Wagemester, a 6-foot-1 junior, did not play for Prairie due to a lingering ailment, leaving the Hawks with only eight players for pre-game warmups. Several players from the Prairie sophomore team eventually joined them after their contest, but it looked like the smaller Hawks might have their hands full against Xavier.

Xavier led 13-10 midway through the second quarter, but Prairie finished the first half with an 8-0 run and scored the first four points of the third quarter to finish a 12-0 spurt.

The visitors took their biggest lead at 27-15 and were never headed, although the Saints made several charges and pulled within one point at 44-43 and 46-45 in the final minute.

Sid McCrea hit one free throw for Prairie to make it 47-45 with 44 seconds left. Xavier committed a turnover and Schmitt cashed two foul shots with 20 seconds left to make it 49-45.

The Saints committed another turnover and Schmitt hit two more free throws to make it 51-45 with nine seconds left to seal the victory.

"She played really well," Bentley said. "We asked a couple of different things out of her and she responded."

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Xavier Coach Tom Lilly was not happy with the way his team played, especially in the first half when the Saints scored only 13 points.

"Sometimes you are not mentally ready to go. And Prairie took it to us," he said. "You have to give them all the credit in the world.

"We were a little bit shell-shocked, waning in confidence. They (the Hawks) played with the desire to win, and we told our kids you can't play not to lose.

"Sometimes you run into a game where you're not ready, you're not sharp early and you start wondering what's going on."

Although Prairie had a 2-8 record when the game began, the Hawks had played a tough schedule with seven of their eight losses against ranked teams.

Prairie was happy to defeat a ranked opponent for a change.

"Anytime you can come in and beat a Tom Lilly-coached team, that's a big win, especially on their home floor," said Bentley.

McCrea finished with 12 points for Prairie. Lexi Noonan led Xavier (7-4) with 14 points.

The Saints travel to West Des Moines Valley for a game Saturday afternoon.

PRAIRIE (52): Schmitt 6 10-11 22, McCrea 4 4-6 12, Moenk 1 1-2 3, McDermott 2 1-1 5, Kilpatrick 0 0-0 0, Kuch 0 0-0 0, Person 2 1-2 5, Deahl 2 1-2 5. Totals 17 18-24 52.

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XAVIER (45): Stanek 3 0-0 9, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Daniels 0 2-4 2, Brown 3 0-0 6, Noonan 6 2-2 14, Steffen 3 2-3 8, Stovie 0 0-0 0, Ivester 3 0-0 6, Jasper 0 0-0 0. Totals 18 6-9 45.

Halftime - Prairie 18, Xavier 13. 3-point goals - Prairie none, Xavier 3 (Stanek 3)