

Saints bumped off by Hempstead

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 21 January 2017 06:36 -



It was easy to look at the Xavier Saints this year and think they had a good chance to win another Class 3A state title with lots of talent back from last season.

They still might get back to Des Moines and take a crack at a state crown, but so far it's been a struggle.

The Saints fell apart in the third quarter Friday night and lost to Dubuque Hempstead, 63-44, in a Mississippi Valley Conference boys basketball game at Ron Thillen Gymnasium.

The loss left Xavier with a 4-7 record heading into a special event Saturday in Omaha against Papillion-LaVista.

Matt Mims, Max Techau and Jackson Joens returned to the starting lineup this season after helping the Saints win the 2016 state title. Nolan Butkowski, a part-time starter, and Bryce Schulte, a key reserve, also returned this year.

"There was every reason to be optimistic when you return those guys," Coach Ryan Luehrsmann said Friday.

Luehrsmann is still optimistic, but the season is half-over and the Saints have yet to hit their stride.

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"Right now, last year is so far in the rear-view mirror and we're so far from that," he said. "I told the guys we have to do some soul-searching, individually and collectively.

"I told them I believe in them and what this group can do," he said. "But potential is one thing and realizing it is another."

The Saints lost two key starters from their state champs when Ryan Stulken and Mitchell Burger graduated and they have not been able to put another cohesive unit together.

Xavier gave Hempstead a good battle in the first half and trailed by only two points, 25-23, but Lucas Duax hit a 3-pointer for Hempstead at the buzzer to make it 28-23 at intermission.

The third quarter was a disaster for the Saints. The Mustangs scored the first eight points of the second half and punished the Saints in the third stanza 20-6 to put the game out of reach at 48-29.



"In the third quarter we just got smoked, and that was the difference in the game," said Luehrsmann. "Twenty-to-six is too hard to recover from against a really good team like that.

"I thought we got a little loose with the ball. We had some critical tournaments that led to each baskets. The perfect storm."

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The Saints have played a tough schedule this season and Hempstead was the latest in a long line of talented opponents.

"They're one of the better teams in our league, for sure," Luehrsmann remarked. "Awfully tough to guard. They've got terrific athletes, great quickness on the perimeter. They shot the ball really well tonight."

The Mustangs (8-3) featured a three-man attack with Keith Johnson popping in 19 points, Lucas Duax 17 and Connor Duax 15.

Techau, a 6-foot-7 senior, had a strong game for Xavier with 16 points, seven rebounds and four blocks, but none of the other Saints cracked double figures. The 44 points were the fewest Xavier has scored in a game this season.

"We're disappointed," said Luehrsmann. "We're angry, and we should be.

"I told them to continue to grind away at it. This team has potential to have some success, I believe. We just have to stay the course and we have some things we have to correct.

"It's frustrating," said Luehrsmann. "I can't totally explain everything, but it's not like we're losing to chumps."

HEMPSTEAD (63): Martin 1 0-0 3, L.Duax 4 6-6 17, Courtney 0 2-2 2, C.Duax 6 2-2 15, Crowder 0 0-1 0, Dolan 0 0-0 0, Muehring 0 0-0 0, Johnson 8 0-0 19, Cooksley 2 0-0 5, Sindberg 1 0-0 2, Vance 0 0-0 0, Beck 0 0-0 0, Kemp 0 0-0 0. Totals 22 10-11 63.

XAVIER (44): Ropp 0 0-0 0, Lux 0 0-0 0, Mims 2 0-0 5, Butkowski 3 1-1 7, Joens 1 0-0 3, Dempewolf 0 0-0 0, Q.Schulte 1 0-0 3, Bartels 0 0-1 0, Moeder 0 0-0 0, Techau 7 2-3 16,

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Johnson 4 0-0 8, B.Schulte 1 0-0 2, Angstman 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 3-5 44.

Halftime - Hempstead 28, Xavier 23. 3-point goals - Hempstead 9 (L.Duax 3, Johnson 3, Martin 1, C.Duax 1, Cooksley 1), Xavier 3 (Mims 1, Joens 1, Q.Schulte 1).