

## Noonan sparks No. 6 Saints in regional

Written by Jim Ecker  
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Xavier senior Lexi Noonan has not decided if she'll play basketball or volleyball in college, so there was a chance Saturday night that her athletic career was going to coming to an untimely finish after the Saints mustered only 15 points in the first half in the Class 4A regional semifinals against Clear Creek Amana.

"It could have been the end of my basketball career," she realized, "but we picked it up."

Noonan poured in 19 of her game-high 21 points in the second half and Xavier rallied for a 55-33 victory over Clear Creek Amana at Ron Thillen Gymnasium for their ninth straight win.

The Saints (16-6) will host 13th-ranked Waverly-Shell Rock (16-6) in the regional finals Tuesday night, with the winner advancing to the Class 4A state tournament.

Xavier trailed 18-15 at halftime after a sluggish 16 minutes of basketball against the visitors from the Wamac Conference, but they notched 40 points in the second half.

"We had a shaky first half, but once we settled down in the second half we played a lot better," said Noonan. "Coach always says our offense feeds off our defense, so once we picked up our defense in the second half it led to our offense and we got more scoring opportunities."

Clear Creek Amana (13-10) took a series of five-point leads in the third quarter at 20-15, 22-17, 24-19 and 26-21 before the Saints finally got untracked midway through the stanza.

Lauren Helle, a 6-foot-1 center for CCA, picked up her fourth foul with 4:41 left in the third quarter and Clear Creek Amana leading 26-21. Helle sat down and the game immediately shifted in favor of the Saints.

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Noonan made three baskets during a 10-0 spurt to help the Saints grab a 31-26 advantage and turn the game around.

Clear Creek Amana Coach PJ Sweeney put Helle back in the game in the final minute of the third period to try and stem the tide, but Helle picked up her fifth foul with 7:46 left in the fourth quarter on another basket by Noonan and was done for the night. Noonan completed the three-point play to give Xavier a 36-28 advantage at that point.

Helle had been a major factor on defense and her absence was critical.

"We were looking over our shoulder at her a lot," said Xavier Coach Tom Lilly. "I thought that was a big play."

The Saints kept pulling away from there. Noonan hit a left-handed layup to make it 38-28, she scored again to make it 41-30 and found Kylie Brown for a basket to make it 43-30.

Amelia Ivester scored for Xavier to make it 45-30 and the Saints were home free.

Lilly thought the Saints were apprehensive in the first half and wanted his club to relax.

"The main thing we talked about at halftime was their body language," he said. "Their body language was not up to par."

Lilly asked the seniors, like Noonan, to set a positive tone in the second half.

"We rely on our senior class to dictate and take over," he noted. "I thought Lexi did that and

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played with a different mindset in the second half. And I thought Caitlynn Daniels energized us and had some nice looks."

Daniels, a freshman point guard, finished with 11 points, six steals, five assists and three rebounds.

Maria Steffen gave the Saints an extra boost off the bench in the second half when they made their surge with two baskets on assists from Daniels, along with an assist of her own to Noonan.

Ivester finished with eight points and four blocked shots.

Karsyn Stratton, a talented freshman for Clear Creek Amana, led her club with 18 points. Helle finished with eight points.

Waverly-Shell Rock rolled by Decorah, 65-23, in the regional semifinals Saturday night and could be a formidable opponent for Xavier in the regional finals Tuesday.

"Hopefully the home-court advantage will help us, but we know Waverly is a pretty salty bunch," said Lilly. "They've got some size and some shooters and they're very well-coached.

"We will have to take our play to another level, I think."

Noonan is not ready for her high school career to end. She helped Xavier reach the semifinals of the state volleyball tournament in November and she'd like to make it a double date.

"It's a dream to qualify for state in basketball and volleyball my senior year," she said. "I think we have a really good chance of making it this year."

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**CLEAR CREEK AMANA (33):** DeShaw 1 0-0 2, Neely 0 0-0 0, Harvey 0 0-0 0, Cronbaugh 0 0-0 0, El.Navara 0 0-0 0, Sweeney 0 0-0 0, Stratton 8 1-2 18, Kinnaird 1 0-0 2, Er.Navara 1 0-0 3, Banwart 0 0-0 0, Helle 4 0-0 8, Schrock 0 0-0 0. Totals 15 1-2 33.

**XAVIER (55):** Stanek 1 1-2 4, Hoffman 0 0-0 0, Daniels 5 1-2 11, Diebold 0 0-0 0, Cooling 0 0-0 0, Brown 3 1-2 7, Noonan 8 5-7 21, Steffen 2 0-0 4, Stovie 0 0-0 0, Ivester 4 0-0 8, Jasper 0 0-2 0. Totals 23 8-13 55.

Halftime - Clear Creek Amana 18, Xavier 15. 3-point goals - Clear Creek Amana 2 (Stratton 1, Er.Navara 1), Xavier 1 (Daniels 1).