MacDougall rallies Hawks past Saints in OT

Written by Tom Fruehling
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The line between victory and defeat is sometimes so fine that it's hard to define.

Depending how you look at it, the Xavier boys either let a win slip away Friday or the Prairie boys escaped a loss.

The fact is that the Saints were ahead at home by 10 points with two minutes left in regulation and then by two with 10 seconds to go.

The Hawks scored 10 straight points to tie the game once and two more at the buzzer to send it into overtime. In the nip-and-tuck extra four minutes, Prairie prevailed from the free throw line, 67-62.

"We played great basketball for 30 minutes," said a disconsolate Xavier Coach Matt Jenkins. "We put ourselves in position for a win. But, in the end, we got outplayed. We didn't execute, and we didn't play smart.

"We had a chance to seal the deal and we made bad decisions down the stretch. And Prairie was determined to beat us."

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With a much bigger line-up of bruisers, the Saints (7-12, 6-8 MVC) controlled the rebounds all night and scored at will from close range. For the game, they made 25 of 32 shots from inside the paint.

"Our philosophy," said Jenkins, "was to go to the well 'til we ran it dry."

And it worked so well that they jumped to an 11-point lead early in the fourth quarter and were up 53-43 with 2:16 to go.

"That's when we got away from what we'd been doing all night," Jenkins said. "We took an unnecessary three, and the momentum shifted. "We started making anxiety errors. And they started making steals and lay-ups."

Considering that the Saints made only two of 16 three-point attempts (both by Trey Sampson), firing them up in the frantic final two minutes was a game-killer.

"I think we just got too comfortable with the lead," said Xavier banger-in-chief Mack Mattke, who owned the boards and led his team with 14 points. "But they hit the big shots when they had to, and we didn't. It just wasn't meant to be for us tonight."

The Hawks (9-10, 5-10 MVC) have lived and died on long-range shooting all year. They made

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nine for the night, including two in the second quarter by Brooks Kehoe and three each by baby-faced junior floor general Jace Hanna (playing with a broken nose) and ever-silent assassin Matt MacDougall.

Out for past two contests with a separated shoulder, MacDougall came off the bench three minutes into the game and immediately hit a long trey and then a high-flying dunk.

"Coach wanted me to wait to get into the flow of the game," said the senior sharpshooter, who ended up with 24 points. "But the adrenaline kicked in, and I felt real comfortable. And Jace was doing a great job getting me the ball."

At the end of regulation, MacDougall took over the game completely. With his team down 53-45 with 1:30 left, he knocked a 3-pointer, stole a pass and raced for his third monster slam of the night and then hit another 3 to tie it up with 30 seconds remaining.

When it looked like the Saints would somehow survive on a lay-up by Kevin Hosch, Hanna hit a clutch jump shot as time ran out.

With Prairie nursing a two-point lead in overtime, MacDougall was again Johnny-on-the-spot with a steal at the two-minute mark.

Hanna hit a pair of free throws, Sampson closed the gap with his second 3 and then steady Hawk senior playmaker Jacob Aune closed the book by sinking four of six free throws in the final half-minute.

"They had us on the ropes, no question," said Prairie Coach James Moses. "They kept throwing punches, but we stayed in the ring and took what they threw at us.

"We didn't get rattled or lose our composure. And when the opportunity arose, our players stepped up and took advantage of what was presented to them."

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After losing some heartbreakers this season, Moses said it felt good to finally win a nail-biter.

"The ball," he said, "just bounced our way tonight."

PRAIRIE (67): Jacob Aune 1 5-7 7, Brooks Kehoe 2 0-0 6, Jace Hanna 3 3-4 12, Garrett Rasmussen 0 0-0 0, Tom Eilers 2 1-2 6, Matt MacDougall 9 3-4 24, DeMetrius Harper 2 0-0 4, Kentrel Smith 0 0-0 0, Bryce Meeker 2 0-0 4, JoJo Simpson 2 0-0 4. Totals 23 12-17 67.

XAVIER (62): Trey Sampson 2 0-1 6, Ben McDermott 4 0-0 8, Kevin Hosch 5 0-3 10, Carter Valentine 3 2-2 8, Mack Mattke 6 2-4 14, Matt Nelson 4 0-1 8, Tanner Frazier 1 0-0 2, Brian Ropp 0 0-0 0, Alec Clasen 2 2-2 6. Totals 27 6-13 62.

Halftime – Xavier 27, Prairie 24. End of regulation – Prairie 55, Xavier 55. 3-point goals – Prairie 9 (Hanna 3, MacDougall 3, Kehoe 2, Eilers), Xavier 2 (Sampson 2). Total fouls – Prairie 14, Xavier 18. Fouled out – Meeker, Hosch.