

Xavier ruins opening of Lions' stadium

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The constant rain couldn't dampen the opening of the new Linn-Mar High School stadium.

Although the boys soccer game didn't go as the Lions wanted, the first game at the new facility was one for the ages as Xavier (No.1 in Class 2A) and Linn-Mar (No.11 in Class 3A) battled to the wire.

Xavier pulled out a 1-1 (3-1) victory on penalty kicks in a tense and highly competitive contest. Logan Buschette, Chad Gilmer and Michael Tessmer made the decisive penalty kicks for the Saints.

"We played a little spoiler here tonight," said Xavier Coach Amir Hadzic. "We knew that they would be pumped up coming to their new field, so those first 10 to 15 minutes were crucial."

The hero of the match for the Saints was senior keeper Nathan Even, who started in goal even though it is his first year playing soccer at Xavier.

"For a keeper, it is really important that he projects confidence," Hadzic said. "For somebody who is in their first time in goal it is amazing. I felt confident on the bench, so you can imagine how his defenders felt."

Even was able to keep up that confidence even after overtime ended in a tie and his defenders were watching from the sideline during the penalty kicks. He made two great saves to push his team to victory.

"We talked a little bit before the PK's (penalty kicks) because that is new to him," Hadzic said. "I just told him not to rush. Read how players do, read their hips, look at them in the eyes, sometimes you can read what they will do."

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But as exciting as the game was at the end, the beginning was more of a defensive battle.

It was difficult to say who gained the upper hand in the first half. Both teams produced several scoring opportunities and both sides dominated the possession for stretches, though neither team was able to break through and score.

That changed early in the second half when Ben McClimon of Linn-Mar received a pass and got behind the defense for a second, but rather than take an awkward shot himself, elected to pass it across the goal to a streaking Jon Paulson, who buried the first varsity goal at Linn-Mar stadium into the back of the net.

Tom Bales of Xavier provided a dramatic, and perhaps a little lucky equalizer in the 75th minute as he put a shot on goal on a free-kick from about 45 yards away that sailed over the outstretched hands of Linn-Mar keeper George Steil.

"I just tried to pull a ball in [the penalty box] and I gave it all I got and it carried and happened to just chip over the keeper," Bales said.

That shot gave the Saints new life and a little bit of renewed energy for the final 4:37 of regulation and the 20 minute overtime.

"They were on their heels the rest of the game," Bales said. "We had them right where we wanted them and kept on the attack."

Linn-Mar Coach Corey Brinkmeyer felt his team got back on its heels a little too much, even before the goal from Bales.

"I was happy with our effort during the first 70 minutes and then we kind of fell back into a shell, we played too defensive and we played not to lose instead of to win," he said.

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AT LINN-MAR

Xavier 1, Linn-Mar 1

(Xavier wins on penalty kicks, 3-1)

Goals -- LM: Jon Paulson; CRX: Tom Bales. Assists -- LM: Ben McClimon. Penalty Kicks -- CRX: Logan Buschette, Chad Gilmer, Michael Tessmer; LM: Eric Pfau.