

Linn-Mar High School has changed its mind and has agreed to play non-district football games against the Xavier Saints in 2016 and 2017.

Two years ago, Linn-Mar athletic director Scott Mahmens said his school was not interested in playing any games against a Class 3A school. The Lions compete at the Class 4A level and he said at the time they wanted to play other 4A schools in non-district games in 2014 and 2015.

Linn-Mar changed its mind and put Xavier on its preferred list of non-district games for the next two-year cycle of games in 2016 and 2017, but Mahmens declined comment when contacted by the Metro Sports Report Friday morning after the Iowa High School Athletic Association released the schedules for all teams.

Xavier athletic director Mike Winker has wanted to play games against any of the 4A Metro schools - Linn-Mar, Kennedy, Washington, Jefferson and Prairie - but they all turned him down during the 2014-15 cycle.

Mahmens told the Metro Sports Report several weeks ago that he put Xavier on his preferred list of opponents. The IHSAA has the final authority on putting the schedules together and they arranged for Xavier to play at Linn-Mar on Friday, Sept. 2. The Lions will visit the Saints in 2017 in the return engagement.

"I'm excited about it," said Winker. "I'm thankful to Linn-Mar for putting us on their priority list. And I think that there will be a great atmosphere on September 2nd. We think it's a great thing for both communities."

Winker has maintained all along that it was a good idea for Metro schools to play Xavier in terms of gate receipts for both schools, concessions and lack of travel costs.

"Obviously football is the driving force of any school's athletic budget," said Winker. "So we're excited to have Linn-Mar coming over here in a couple of years."

Although Mahmens declined comment to the Metro Sports Report, he did grant an interview with The Gazette for a story posted on their website. Mahmens told The Gazette that it "just made sense" to play Xavier.

"They're a good football program, it's close and it will be a good gate," he said. "It will be our second game and our home opener. It should be a packed house."

Linn-Mar will play Iowa City High, Jefferson and Washington in its other non-district games.

Xavier will face Class 1A power Iowa City Regina in its other non-district games in 2016 and 2017. The Saints and Regals met in 2014 and 2015 and wanted to continue the series for another two years.

Xavier defeated Regina, 38-35, in Iowa City this past season with a stirring comeback and a last-second field goal. Regina Coach Marv Cook has led the Regals to six state titles in a row and last year's loss to the Saints was their only setback of the season.

"After our game last year, the thing I remember is shaking hands after that game with Marv and him saying, 'Hey, this was fun, let's do it again.' That's about all we said at mid-field when we shook hands," said Schulte. "And we're doing it again.

"He's got a great perspective on football and on life," said Schulte. "It doesn't surprise me with Marv."

Winker is glad the two private schools have agreed to extend the series.

"This is turning into a nice rivalry for us," he said. "And it's the next-best thing to a Metro game. They're one of the most successful programs in the history of Iowa, when you look at their state championships.

"I think there's a lot of respect between the coaches, the players and the fans. It was a great environment in Iowa City last year."

Xavier had three non-district games in 2014 and 2015 with Regina, Dowling and Davenport Assumption, but now all Class 3A schools have only two non-district games with the new district configuration.

All of the Class 4A schools have four non-district games.

Kennedy will play Muscatine, Washington, Hempstead and Jefferson in non-district games the next two years.

Jefferson will face Pleasant Valley, Prairie, Linn-Mar and Kennedy.

Prairie will play Washington, Jefferson, Clinton and Davenport Central.

Washington will play Prairie, Kennedy, Bettendorf and Linn-Mar.

Marion will face Union and Benton Community in its two non-district games in Class 3A.

Cedar Valley Christian will play West Central and Clarksville in its two non-district 8-player games.

2016 METRO FOOTBALL SCHEDULES

* Non-district games

Cedar Valley Christian

* 08/26 West Central Maynard
* 09/02 Clarksville
09/09 at English Valleys
09/16 Iowa Valley
09/23 at Lone Tree
09/30 Midland
10/07 at WACO, Wayland
10/14 at Springville
10/21 Easton Valley

Kennedy

* 08/25 Muscatine
* 09/02 at Washington
* 09/09 at Dubuque Hempstead
* 09/16 Jefferson
09/23 Burlington
09/30 at Linn-Mar
10/07 Iowa City West
10/14 at Ottumwa
10/21 Prairie

Jefferson

* 08/26 Pleasant Valley
* 09/02 at Prairie
* 09/09 Linn-Mar
* 09/16 at Cedar Rapids Kennedy
09/22 at Washington
09/29 Waterloo West
10/07 at Waterloo East
10/14 Cedar Falls
10/21 at Mason City

Linn-Mar

* 08/26 at Iowa City High
* 09/02 Xavier
* 09/09 at Jefferson
* 09/16 Washington
09/23 at Ottumwa
09/30 Kennedy
10/07 at Prairie
10/14 Iowa City West
10/21 at Burlington

Marion

* 08/26 at Union
* 09/02 Benton Community
09/09 Central DeWitt
09/16 at Dubuque Wahlert
09/23 Maquoketa
09/30 at Center Point-Urbana
10/07 Clear Creek-Amana
10/14 at West Delaware
10/21 Davenport Assumption

Prairie

* 08/26 Washington
* 09/02 Jefferson
* 09/09 at Clinton
* 09/15 at Davenport Central
09/23 Iowa City West
09/30 at Ottumwa
10/07 Linn-Mar
10/14 Burlington
10/21 at Kennedy

Xavier

* 08/26 Iowa City Regina
* 09/02 at Linn-Mar
09/09 at Benton Community
09/16 Charles City
09/23 at Decorah
09/30 Independence
10/07 at Waverly-Shell Rock
10/14 Vinton-Shellsburg
10/21 at South Tama

Washington

* 08/26 at Prairie
* 09/02 Kennedy
* 09/09 at Bettendorf
* 09/16 at Linn-Mar
09/22 Jefferson
09/30 Cedar Falls
10/07 at Mason City
10/13 Waterloo East
10/21 at Waterloo West