

Prairie spikers fall to Xavier

Written by Tom Fruehling

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On Cedar Rapids Xavier Volleyball Senior Night, the eight upperclassmen on the 11-woman squad were determined to go out on a high note.

“This was our last regular-season home game,” outside hitter Kasey Vanden Bosch said after the Saints throttled Prairie, 3-0. “It made it a little bit more special.”

Fellow senior and middle blocker Kara Zwanziger agreed.

“We knew Prairie was good. They've beaten some good teams,” she said. “But we came out with a lot of energy, and I thought we kept up our energy all the way.”

Both girls were solid at the net all night.

Besides taking the brunt of blocks on Prairie's twin tower sisters Meghan and Kaitlyn Busswitz, they picked up more than their usual share of kills. Vanden Bosch notched eight of them for the night and Zwanziger seven.

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Each of them also recorded a couple of ace serves.

"I just try to be consistent on my serves," Zwanziger said. "Of course the main thing is just to get them over the net."

The fact that the pair had such strong showings against the Hawks' formidable front line was by design, according to Saints Coach Krista Johnson.

As usual, Xavier's power duo of Kayla Torson and Madsy Richards (both juniors) were potent hitters from either side. When the two of them wind up for spikes, their high-velocity line drives are rarely touched.

"We didn't want Prairie to just camp out on Kayla and Madsy," the coach explained. "We tried to move it around more."

Johnson credited senior setter Britni Scholtes with playing a smart, effective floor game. "She really did a nice job mixing it up and directing the flow," the coach said.

Torson and Richards, of course, were still the most fearsome offensive threats. Both can jump out of the gym and have sledgehammers for right arms.

But, said Zwanziger, "We tried to spread the wealth around and open up some holes for solid kills."

In the first set, Torson started off with straight kills to give Xavier a 5-1 edge. She didn't let up, driving the Saints to a 22-15 lead.

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A kill by Kaitlyn Busswitz and two more from Rachael Butz cut the margin to 23-20, however, and Malia Gudenkauf pulled her team to within one at 24-23. A big shot by Vanden Bosch, though, preserved the 25-23 squeaker.

Still, Vanden Bosch said, “they gave us a run for our money.”

Her coach expected no less. “Prairie is really scrappy,” Johnson pointed out, “and their tall girls kind of took us out of our offense.

“I thought we made far too many errors in the first game. But we calmed down and stayed composed. We played well together as a team with high energy.”

With Saints senior libero Halley Heying serving (and scoring two aces), Xavier built a 21-9 lead in the second set. A kill by Richards finished it at 25-15.

The Hawks kept the third game close for awhile, but Zwanziger's two kills put the Saints ahead by five and Richards hit four more spikes to end the match at 25-19.

For the night, Torson had 14 kills and Richards 12.

Vanden Bosch said everyone on the team contributed to the victory.

“We were all flying all over the court,” she said. “We kept pushing, and we were winning some long rallies.”

Johnson said her senior-laden squad also looked like it was having a good time. “We play better,” she said, “when we're having fun.”

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The Mississippi Valley Conference tournament will be held at Cedar Falls this Saturday.