

Saints boys hold off Prairie

Written by Don Taylor

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The first half was run and gun and the second half was much more methodical, but the result was a 56-51 Xavier victory in Mississippi Valley Conference boys basketball at Prairie Friday night.

Both teams were putting up points in the first half. It was 19-19 at the quarter and Xavier led 35-29 at the half, forging their margin in the last two minutes of the half. In the second half defense improved and the pace slowed and while Prairie actually outscored Xavier, it wasn't by enough.

"Prairie really made it hard on us in the second half. We really struggled to maintain our lead; we just had to weather the storm," said Xavier Coach Matt Jenkins.

That was the case as Prairie (3-15, 2-11 MVC) managed to cut the lead to 48-46 at one point in the fourth quarter. Down the stretch, Xavier (5-14, 4-10) maintained its composure in a loud road environment and the Hawks missed four critical free throws that cooled their comeback effort.

"We lost continuity on offense in the second half," said Prairie Coach James Moses. "Our players need to trust the game plan that we design for the game. There is a reason for the plan and we need to play inside that plan."

Alec Clasen led the balanced Saints attack with 13 points. Mitch McLaughlin scored 12, and Carter Valentine knocked in 10.

"McLaughlin ran the offense, while Clasen and Valentine came off the bench to give us some valuable minutes and important scoring, they made the difference for us," said Jenkins.

"Prairie shot well in the first half and in the second half we played better defense and got some transitional baskets that helped," said Clasen. "We were balanced tonight and we usually play best when we are balanced like that."

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Prairie, playing again without leading scorer Matt MacDougall, who is recovering from the flu, was led in scoring by Thomas Eilers with 13 points and Jerome Frazier had 10.

"I think we needed to be a little more aggressive on offense and drive to the basket more to draw fouls and we did that better in the second half," said Eilers. "We shot a lot more free throws in the second half and I think that helped."

Xavier plays Waterloo East at home on Tuesday and Prairie hosts Dubuque Hempstead Saturday afternoon at 4:30.

XAVIER (56): McLaughlin 5 0-0 12, Dunkirk 0 0-0 0, McDermott 3 1-2 8, Hosch 3 1-4 7, Clasen 4 4-5 13, Mattke 0 1-2 1, Valentine 5 0-0 10, Ropp 0 0-0 0, Mains 2 1-2 5. Totals 22 8-15 56.

PRAIRIE (51): Frazier 4 2-4 10, Jantzen 2 0-0 5, Lafferty 2 0-2 4, Boots 1 0-0 3, Eilers 4 2-3 13, Aune 2 0-0 5, Mougins 1 2-2 4, Hilgenkamp 2 0-1 5, Kehoe 1 0-0 2, Dellamuth 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 6-12 51.

Halftime – Xavier 35, Prairie 29. 3-point goals – Prairie 7 (Eilers 3, Boots, Jantzen, Aune, Hilgenkamp) Xavier 4 (McLaughlin 2, Clasen, McDermott). Fouled out -- None.