

Saints cap 'unbelievable' season with 2nd straight title

Written by

Saturday, 04 June 2011 19:15 -

DES MOINES - The Xavier boys soccer team set out to "shock the world" at the beginning of the season and on Saturday the Saints completed their mission.

Xavier knocked off Norwalk, 1-0, in the state championship game at the Cownie Soccer Complex. It was the Saints' second straight title.

After last year's state championship season, the Saints lost three first team all-state players and there were doubters that they could repeat.

But the team never lost faith.

"Shock the world baby," senior defender Tim Bouchard exclaimed. "A lot of people said we couldn't do it after losing (Aaron) Lacey, Chuck (Charlie Bales) and Clayton (Lynch), three all-stars last year. A lot of people said there is no way to do it, we don't have the star power.

"But we came together all winter, came together all season. Since March 15, at the beginning of this year, we have had one dream and that was this and we did it. It is unbelievable."

The championship gave the Xavier boys soccer program five state championships overall. The Saints won three in a row from 2004-2006. The Saints had a three-year title drought after that before winning again last year. This year's team wanted to make sure that everyone knew that Xavier boys soccer is back.

"Before last year we kind of had a drought and we just wanted to keep that Xavier history going and get the streak started up again," said senior Michael Tessmer.

Xavier looked good in the championship game, dominating the possession and winning balls all throughout the midfield. Meanwhile, Tessmer and junior Chad Gilmer gave the Norwalk

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defense problems all day, but the Saints had trouble guiding the ball into the net.

"We had possession most of the time and we were just hoping to poke one in," Bouchard said. "We had a couple chances early, Tessmer was exploiting that left side. The keeper was huge so we had to keep our crosses down, which we had trouble with, but we knew we would get our break sooner or later."

That break came early in the second half when the Norwalk keeper, Zach Schroeder beat a charging Gilmer to the ball. But as Gilmer peeled off to avoid a collision, Schroeder's right leg came up and caught Gilmer in the midsection, dropping him to the turf.

"I just saw the ball get knocked over and thought I could get to it. I ended up not getting to it and had a little collision," Gilmer said. "It was a good call by the ref, its how the game is, you can't control that stuff."

Schroeder was given a yellow card on the play and, according to high school rules, he had to leave the field for 10 minutes. That left backup keeper Spencer Hoyt to defend against the resulting penalty kick. Logan Bouchette hammered it into the net, giving the Saints a 1-0 lead.

Once Xavier got the lead, the team was confident in relying upon its defense to bring home the win. The Saints finished the season with five straight shutouts through the substate and state tournaments.

"We've got a lot of chemistry," Bouchard said of the Xavier defense. "(Eric) Kapfer stepped up huge. Tom Bales is solid in the middle. Nothing gets through him and between (Tyler) Laska and (Brian) Curphey on the left. We just communicate well and step together."

Anchoring the defense was senior keeper Nate Even who was named the 2A all-tournament team captain in his first season playing soccer for the Saints after earning three clean sheets in three days at the state tournament.

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"I just came out here and tried to do the job they asked me to play," Even said. "The defense was great."

Bouchard, Gilmer and Tessmer joined Even on the all-tournament team.

The Saints had 13 seniors on the team and Coach Amir Hadzic said that they have been a great source of leadership all season.

"I will remember fantastic senior leadership," he said. "When you have kids like Zach Smith and Tim Bouchard on your team, and Braxton Chicchelly or Michael Tessmer, the team is really everything to them. There is no me or all-state team it is all about the team. When they preach that from minute one in the locker room and when we (coaches) are not around, you rarely find leaders like that and everybody just feeds off it."

Xavier 1, Norwalk 0

Goals -- Xavier: Logan Bouchette (45th min).