

Hot Saints win Linn-Mar tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 27 June 2015 20:34 -



The closer Nikki Gahring comes to giving birth to her own child, the better her kids on the Xavier softball team keep playing.

The Saints finished an impressive week by topping Center Point-Urbana, 8-6, in the championship game of the Linn-Mar softball tournament Saturday afternoon.

Xavier swept Linn-Mar on Tuesday, swept Cedar Falls on Thursday, won two games in the Linn-Mar tournament Friday and won two more games Saturday for eight victories in five days.

The Saints, now riding a nine-game winning streak, have raised their record to 17-9 as they get closer to the postseason and closer to Gahring's due date in two weeks.

The Saints beat some good teams in the Linn-Mar tournament with a 2-1 victory over Waverly-Shell Rock (ranked No. 8 in Class 4A), a 2-1 victory over Linn-Mar (ranked No. 10 in 5A last week) and the 8-6 verdict over Center Point-Urbana (ranked No. 7 in Class 3A).

"They did a real good job," said Gahring, who celebrated her birthday Saturday. "It's been a good week. A lot of focus. A lot of talk and communication."

"I think a big part of it, they've taken ownership of their team. They're talking to each other and getting more of that determined effort and determined attitude."

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The Saints began the Linn-Mar tournament with a 7-3 victory over Monticello, then had three straight tight games against good competition in the 16-team event.



"We definitely proved something," said senior Erin Drahozal. "It's always a good tournament. It's good to get a couple of wins under our belt before the postseason."

The Saints were cruising with an 8-0 lead against Center Point-Urbana after six innings of the championship game with Drahozal tossing a shutout, but Drahozal needed to quit pitching due to a sore right shoulder that began bothering her this past week.

Kylie Oldridge replaced Drahozal to start the bottom of the seventh inning, but Oldridge struggled and Center Point-Urbana staged a furious comeback. The Stormin Pointers pulled within 8-6 and brought the tying run to the plate with nobody out.

It got exciting, but Maria Steffen rescued the Saints by getting the final three outs on a strikeout and two infield grounders.

Cassie Himmelsbach drove in four runs for Xavier with a pair of two-run singles in the sixth and seventh innings, helping the Saints grab their 8-0 margin. "My approach going in was just to get the ball in play and make them do something with it," she said.

"I think we're getting on a roll," said Himmelsbach. "It's a good time for us to get on a roll, especially with how far we are in the season."

Charlotte Richards went 3-for-3 for Xavier and scored twice. Kailee Becker, Drahozal, Morgan

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Breitbach and Himmelsbach had two hits. Jamie Feltes drove in two runs.

Drahozal left the ballpark with an ice bag fastened to her right shoulder. She appeared to be in pain when she left the game for a courtesy runner in the sixth inning, but shrugged it off.

"It wasn't bad," she said. "It was bearable, but Coach and I both thought it was a good idea to bring somebody else in (to pitch).

"Just a little discomfort. Nothing bad," she said.

Xavier has a doubleheader Monday night against Waterloo West and Drahozal plans to pitch. "Definitely," she said with conviction.

Center Point-Urbana went 3-1 in the tournament and has a 20-11 record.

Fort Dodge trimmed Linn-Mar, 3-2, for third place.

Xavier □ □ □ 000 103 4 - 8 12 1

Center Point □ 000 000 6 - 6 8 1

W - Drahozal. L - S.Croghan. S - Steffen.