

Schulte nabs 150th win as Saints roll

Written by Clete Campbell

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EPWORTH – This time around, no one was issuing Upset Alerts on Twitter. Nobody was talking about the district stunner of the year on Facebook.

Nobody wearing Xavier blue was sweating bullets in the fourth quarter.

And nobody was questioning Friday night that Class 3A, District 4 belongs to the Xavier Saints.

Revisiting a dangerous, nothing-to-lose Western Dubuque team that shell-shocked them last season, the first-place and undefeated Saints were all business and mostly all dominant in a 35-12 air-powered push past the Bobcats before a packed house at Buchman Field.

The victory earned Xavier coach Duane Schulte his 125th victory with the Saints and 150th career triumph.

"I'll be honest: It's special," Schulte said. "It goes to show I've had a lot of good people helping me."

A year ago, the Bobcat defense choked Xavier's multi-dimensional attack to a single touchdown and completely silenced quarterback Bryce Schulte, holding him without a completed pass in a stunning 7-6 upending of the Saints at Saints Field.

"We really wanted revenge on these guys," wide receiver Ryan Stulken said. "We got it."

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The biggest difference between last year and Friday: Bryce Schulte's deft, cool ability to burn Western Dubuque off play-action.

The junior torched the Bobcat secondary for four first-half touchdown strikes. A major key to Schulte and the Saints' long-ball success was the Xavier running backs' ability to escape through the line and break free unmarked downfield.

Schulte located Blake Whitten all alone in the right flat for a 75-yard scoring strike 6:55 into the first quarter.

But Schulte was just getting warmed up. He found Nick Stark on a 7-yard scoring play off a slot pass, then threaded double coverage to find the leaping 6-foot-5 Stulken on a 17-yard TD pass that gave Xavier a 21-0 advantage with 6:55 left before halftime.

"Bryce always throws a great ball," Stulken said. "When we call a pass play, you know Bryce is going to put the ball on the spot."

Schulte capped the half by firing a 61-yard score to wide-open running back Maliki Wilson, and Xavier went to halftime cruising with a 28-0 lead.

"Our play-action really worked well," said Bryce Schulte, who has thrown 14 touchdowns against just one interception in five games and owns one of the state's best quarterback ratings. "Our offensive line did a great job selling the fakes, our backs sold their fakes and our receivers ran their routes."

For the game Schulte hit 7-of-13 passes for 208 yards.

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"He's an incredibly gifted young man and he's a coach's kid," Bobcats coach Justin Penner said. "I think the best is yet to come. Unfortunately for the rest of us, he's got another year. He's going to continue to progress."

A week after shredding Maquoketa for a school-record tying four touchdowns, Wilson regularly met a pack of defenders, including all-state caliber defensive linemen Aaron Costello and Keaton Deutmeyer, on every touch.

Still, the senior muscled his way to 75 yards on 16 carries, including his latest "wow" play of the year: A 23-yard third-quarter razzle-dazzle touchdown. Wilson started by sweeping right, then ran into a wall. The jet-setter reversed field and switched to fifth gear, riding a road-clearing block by lineman Joe Constant to the end zone.

"A lot of (Xavier's offensive success) is our offensive line," Duane Schulte said. "Bryce sure did make some great plays, but Max Johnson, Ryan Jasper, Sam Meyers, Joe Constant, who's come a long way, played great."

The Saints (5-0, 4-0 District 4) delivered one of their most impressive defensive performances of the season. Xavier took the air out of the Bobcats' running game, limiting WD's triple option attack to a quiet 143 yards on 40 carries.

Xavier turned in a stellar red zone stand just before halftime, shaking off two personal foul penalties that cost them 30 yards of real estate, to deny the Bobcats (1-5, 0-4) a score. Western Dubuque's nine-play drive died at the halftime horn when Stark tipped away Dylan Gotto's pass in the middle of the end zone.

Linebacker Bryce Charipar sacked Gotto twice as Xavier kept the WD quarterback under constant pressure.

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“Our defensive line was really pushing it,” Charipar said. “They opened up (blitzing) lanes for our linebackers.”

The Bobcats went 0-for-9 on drives in the first half and were stonewalled by Xavier on all three of their fourth-down conversion attempts. Kameron Kramer, one of District 4's top running backs, needed 16 tries to net just 63 yards.

One troubling sign Friday night: The Saints continued to see far too many yellow flags. After committing 14 penalties against Maquoketa, Xavier was flagged another 13 times Friday, including two dead-ball fouls.

The Saints gave away more than a football field of yardage (115 yards) on penalties. They won't be able to get away with that type of sloppy play in the playoffs.

Xavier may be undefeated, but the Saints feel they're still far from a perfect football team.

“We still have a lot of work to do,” Bryce Schulte said. “We're not satisfied.”

Schulte has compiled a 150-77 record in 22 years as a head coach. That includes a 125-63 mark in 18 years at Xavier and a 25-14 record in four years at LaSalle.

XAVIER 35, WESTERN DUBUQUE 12

. **XAV** **WD**

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First downs 10 12

Rushes-yards 40-176 40-143

Passing yards 208 59

Comp-Att-Int 7-13-0 5-17-0

Fumbles-lost 5-1 2-1

Punts-avg. 6-34.5 6-29.3

Penalties-yards 13-115 2-15

Xavier 14 14 7 0 - 35

W. Dubuque 0 0 0 12 - 12

Scoring plays

X – Blake Whitten 75 pass from Bryce Schulte (Dallas Klein kick).

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X – Nick Stark 7 pass from Schulte (Klein kick).

X – Ryan Stulken 17 pass from Schulte (Klein kick).

X – Maliki Wilson 61 pass from Schulte (Klein kick).

X – Wilson 23 run (Klein kick).

WD – Spencer McDermott 31 pass from Dylan Gotto (kick blocked).

WD – Chaz Bergfeld 12 pass from Nick Lembezeder (kick failed).

Individual statistics

Passing

Xavier – Bryce Schulte 7-13-0, 208.

Western Dubuque – Dylan Gotto 4-15-0, 41, Nick Lembezeder 2-2-0, 16.

Rushing

Xavier – Maliki Wilson 16-75, Josh Gerke 4-35, Erik Rodriguez 4-28, Schulte 4-13, Jacob Miller 3-7, Brian Lang 1-1, Gabe Smith 3-minus 4, Nick Stark

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1-minus 11.

Western Dubuque – Kameron Kramer 16-63, Dain Gansen 8-39, Nick Lembezeder 4-27, Reid Hoefler 3-19, Dylan Gotto 8-4, Josh Buerger 2-minus 3.

Receiving

Xavier – Ryan Stulken 4-65, Blake Whitten 1-75, Wilson 1-61, Nick Stark 1-7.

Western Dubuque – Spencer McDermott 2-30, Chaz Bergfeld 2-18, Fred Silker 2-12, Kenny Beard 1-4.