

Reeling Saints drop 5th in row

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Xavier Saints are healthy again, but they need a healthy dose of confidence before heading into the Class 3A postseason tournament next week.

And they really need a win.

The Saints played well in stretches Tuesday night but lost to Cedar Falls and sharp-shooter AJ Green, 64-57, for their fifth straight loss in Mississippi Valley Conference games.

Once sitting pretty with a 13-2 record, the Saints have dropped all the way to 13-7 heading into another tough game Thursday night in the regular-season finale at Dubuque Wahlert.

Green, a baby-faced sophomore, popped in eight 3-pointers and scored 28 points for the Tigers, who are ranked No. 7 in Class 4A with a 16-4 record. The Saints led 45-40 entering the final period, but they were outscored 24-12 in the fourth quarter.

"We've played high-quality opponents, particularly in Iowa City West and Linn-Mar and Cedar Falls," said Xavier coach Ryan Luehrsmann, analyzing the five-game skid. "The Waterloo schools are improving and getting

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better.

"We had a hard time with some injuries. I think that threw off our chemistry and timing a little bit. And we haven't been very good defensively."

Mitchell Burger and Matt Mims, Xavier's star guards, missed games with sprained ankles during the losing streak, but both of them are healthy now and producing again. Burger made five 3-pointers Tuesday and scored 21 points and Mims had 18 points, but both of them were fairly quiet in the fourth quarter when Cedar Falls took control.

Green barely missed a shot for Cedar Falls with silky smooth jumpers.

"I just got in rhythm early," said Green, who is being followed by the University of Northern Iowa and other Division I schools. "My teammates were finding me. They did a good job."



The Saints tried to slow Green on the perimeter with a 3-2 zone, but he got too many good looks and took advantage.

"He had it going tonight," Cedar Falls coach Ryan Schultz said. "He can get it really going at times.

"He's not a guy that takes any plays off. He defends really well, he can really handle the ball.

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He's just a great all-around player."

Luehrsmann said the Saints had too many breakdowns on defense.

"We lost track of a star player and you can't do that," he said. "When you break down on a possession a good shooter like that is going to burn you, and that's what happened tonight. He's just a heck of a player and he was real hot tonight."

Luehrsmann is confident the Saints will get rolling again in the postseason. The Saints have drawn a favorable draw in the Class 3A playoffs and are a heavy favorite to reach the state tournament, despite the late-season struggles.

"We've definitely hit a little bit of a bump," he said. "It's a hard thing to go through, but as I told them: Our goal at the beginning of the year was to be as good as we could be at tournament time. I still feel like we can do that.

"That's what we're selling," he said. "Hopefully they're buying and we can rebound."

CEDAR FALLS (64): Fagan 2 7-10 11, Harrington 0 0-0 0, Green 9 2-2 28, Alexander 3 4-4 11, Johnson 1 0-0 2, Bower 1 0-0 2, Gerdes 4 2-2 10.
Totals 20 15-18 64.

XAVIER (57): Burger 8 0-0 21, Mims 6 4-4 18, Butkowski 2 0-0 5, Joens 1 0-0 3, Stulken 1 0-0 2, Schulte 1 0-0 2, Techau 3 0-0 6. Totals 22 4-4 57.

Halftime - Xavier 30, Cedar Falls 22. 3-point goals - Cedar Falls 9 (Green 8, Alexander 1), Xavier 9 (Burger 5, Mims 2, Butkowski 1, Joens 1.)