

## Saints cannot serve up win against Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

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The serve appears to be the simplest shot in volleyball, but the ball can get a little heavy and the nerves can get a little tight in a big match against a quality opponent.

That seemed to be part of the problem for the Xavier Saints Tuesday night when they lost to Kennedy, 23-25, 25-15, 25-23, 25-19, in a battle of Mississippi Valley Conference heavyweights at Xavier.

The Saints gave away too many points at critical parts in the match with service errors when they either hit the ball out-of-bounds or slammed the ball into the net. All the Cougars had to do was stand there and see another point posted on their side of the scoreboard.

And at the same time, the Saints had a few problems when they tried to return Kennedy's tough serves.

"I think our service pressure and our serve receive were probably not at the level it needs to be," said Xavier Coach Austin Filer. "We put a lot of emphasis into our defense, and I thought our defense was better and I thought we did a lot of nice things there.

"But the ability to serve receive is probably the highest skill and the most important skill, and we didn't do as good a job tonight as Kennedy did.

"It always kind of stinks when it's crunch time and you're scoring and all of a sudden you hit one

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out-of-bounds or into the net and it's tough," said Filer. "It's part of playing sports."

The Saints, who are ranked No. 4 in Class 4A, fell to 26-7 for the campaign. The Saints began the year with 18 straight wins, but they have posted a modest 8-7 record in their last 15 matches against stiff competition.

The Cougars, who are ranked No. 7 in Class 5A, have a strong club that features Paige Franck, who will play college volleyball at the University of Iowa, along with 6-foot-2 slammer Kayla Joyner and many other good players.

Xavier got off to a good start Tuesday night with a 25-23 victory in the first set. Charlotte Richards, a 5-foot-11 junior, collected seven kills in that set to steer her team in the right direction.



The Cougars turned the tide in the second set with a 25-15 victory to square the match. The critical third set was tied 17-17, but Franck sparked the Cougars with two straight kills and Kennedy won the game 25-23 on a slam by Joyner.

The Saints made a bid to stay alive in the fourth set when they pulled within 19-18 on a flurry of big plays by Richards, but Kennedy Coach Michelle Goodall called a timeout and her club responded by winning six of the next seven points for the 25-19 victory.

Xavier and Kennedy will be co-hosts of the Mississippi Valley Conference meet this Saturday, beginning at 9 a.m. at Xavier and 10 a.m. at Kennedy. The championship semifinals are scheduled for 2:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. at Xavier, with the third-place match at 4:30 and the finals at 5:30 at Xavier.

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Nine of the 14 teams in the conference are currently ranked in Class 4A or 5A. Cedar Falls is ranked No. 1 in 5A and is favored to win the title, but many other teams are capable of claiming the title.

"Our biggest focus right now is trying to get ready for postseason play," said Filer. "We're grateful to be in an awesome conference and play against great 5A schools and get pushed by that."