

## Saints bounced by No. 1 Clippers, 18-3

Written by Tom Fruehling  
Wednesday, 11 July 2012 00:11 -

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OXFORD – It's the most bucolic of small town softball settings, an immaculately groomed dirt diamond with bleachers filled by townsfolk from all around and the entire outdoor fence ringed by fans in lawn chairs.

The big city girls from Xavier seemed like they belonged there at the start Tuesday night, throwing a slight scare into the hometown Clear Creek Amana Clippers.

The Saints' hopes were short-lived, however, as the Class 4A top-ranked team showed why it sports a 41-1 record and won the Class 3A state title last year.

Ahead just 4-1 after three innings, the Clippers unloaded for five runs in the fourth and nine more in the fifth in sailing to an 18-3 five inning rout over Xavier (24-18) in a regional final.

"I thought we started out a little tight," said Coach Jim White, who's been at the helm at CCA for 18 years with a powerhouse program learned from Burlington's legendary Dick Wagner.

"I've always said the regional final is the toughest game you have because you're thinking ahead to the prize of going to state. Too often, you think too much about the prize and not about the game."

There's another thing, White noted.

It's been said that his team may be the best in the state among all schools. Its only loss this year early in the season was to Ankeny, the top-ranked Class 5A team, and that defeat was avenged two weeks later.

"When people keep telling you how great you are," White said, "these 16, 17, 18-year-old girls

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sometimes forget they still have to play the game.”

The Saints certainly didn't seem intimidated, even after the Clippers took a 2-0 lead in the top of the first inning on a monster home run by slugger Caitlin Wnek.

The senior shortstop, one of four players on her team with a batting average above .500, proved a terror all night, going 3-for-4 with five runs batted in with a double, triple and homer.

Xavier rallied right back in the bottom of the first, manufacturing a score on a hit batter and a sacrifice fly by Jamie Feltes that plated Allison Schwach.

The Saints stranded two in the inning and two more in the second on a hit by Erica Miller and an uncharacteristic error by the Clippers.

“We gave ourselves opportunities early and put ourselves in a position to get some runs,” said Xavier interim coach Nikki Price. “We just didn't capitalize on our scoring opportunities. But we kept plugging away.”

Their gutsy play was no match for the home-town favorites, though. CCA tacked on two runs in the third on just one hit, but unleashed a flurry of hits over the next two innings.

The Clippers chased Saints ace Jacey Wiebold after putting their first five batters on base in the fourth, then were no kinder to reliever Erin Drahozal. They more than batted around in both the fourth and the fifth innings, tallying 14 runs on 11 hits.

“Once we relaxed a bit, we really started hitting the ball,” White said.

Xavier picked up two runs of its own in the fourth when freshman pinch-hitter Morgan Breitbach

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parked a homer to center off star Clipper pitcher Maliah Fligg.

"She'd been struggling a little bit with our hitters," said Breitbach. "I waited for my pitch and got one on the inside half of the plate. I was able to get out in front of it."

It was her first varsity home run and caused White to pull Fligg. "It was a big adrenalin rush," Breitbach said.

While CCA goes on to play West Delaware (30-10) next Tuesday in the first round of the state tournament at Fort Dodge, the Saints' season is over. With only two seniors on the roster, their future appears bright.

"They're a very young team," White said. "They're going to be very good next year. They're a real scrappy team."

Xavier senior Lindsay Ireland, the only upperclassman in the lineup after fellow senior Kelsey Kuba-Tresnak tore her ACL in the opening game, said it's been a good year for the Saints.

"We improved every day of the season," she said. "We always played with energy, and we came ready to play each and every game."

"Even tonight, we were able to shake them up a little bit. But you just can't stop a good team like that."

Clear Creek Amana 202 59 – 18 15 2

Xavier 100 20 – 3 5 2

Maliah Fligg, Miranda Hochstetler (4) and Cassie Downs; Jacey Wiebold, Erin Drahozal (4) and

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Erica Miller. W – Fligg (25-1). L – Wiebold (11-10). 2B - Wnek, Strub 2, Walls. 3B - Wnek, Neubauer. HR - Wnek, Breitbach.