Written by Charlie Warnimont Monday, October 28, 2013 12:00 AM -



By Charlie Warnimont

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BATH TWP — Defense has been the strong suit of the Kalida girls soccer team all season.

With a offense that has struggled at times because of injuries and the graduation losses last season, the LadyCats' defense had been vital to their success in 2013. And for nearly 75 minutes Saturday evening, that defense nearly had Kalida headed back to the Division III regional tournament.

Having been frustrated by Kalida's defense time after time during their Division III district final at Bath, Continental broke through in the final 5-plus minutes to score twice on their way to a 2-1 win over the Wildcats.

The win advances the Lady Pirates (13-2-2) to the Division III regional semifinals Tuesday night against Oak Harbor at 7 p.m. in Ottawa Hills. Kalida saw another excellent season end at 14-2-3.

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After playing to 1-1 tie in the regular season just over two weeks ago, no expected anything but a defensive struggle between the two Putnam County League rivals. And that's what the standing room crowd got as quality scoring opportunities were at a minimum.

Both teams were credited with seven shots on-goal in the match with Kalida goalie Sarah Verhoff getting four saves and Continental keeper Emma Recker having four saves as well.

Although the Pirates seemed to control the flow of the match much of the night, they had nothing to show for it for 75 minutes as they were frustrated by the Kalida defense. That was especially true for Pirate senior forward Paige Ordway as Kalida sophomore Cathy Basinger shadowed her anytime she got near the ball on the offensive end of the field.

The strategy eventually forced Continental coach Toby Bidlack to move Ordway back to midfield and possibly open up some scoring chances for the Pirates.

"Basinger did a fantastic job defending Paige, the best job anyone has done all year," Bidlack said. "It made things extremely difficult but we were fortunate to get that foul called at the top of the box and Paige had a moment there. She hit it and made it count."

Two of Ordway's shots in the game were on direct kicks from farther out, one sailing over the crossbar and Verhoff nabbing the other. With time winding down on the Continental season, a Kalida defender was called for a foul just outside the penalty area trying to take the ball away from a Pirate forward.

This time, Ordway made the most of the opportunity as she put her shot in the upper right hand corner of the net to tie the match at 1-1 with 5:14 left.

As time continued to tick off the clock, it looked destined for overtime. However, McKenna Scott took care of that.

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Scott had taken a few shots at the Kalida goal throughout the contest but couldn't score. After taking a pass near midfield, Scott was making a run at the Wildcat goal when she pulled up and fired a shot from 25 yards out, hitting the right post and bouncing across the mouth of the goal before rolling across the line to give the Pirates a 2-1 lead with 1:45 left.

Kalida was unable to mount a scoring threat in the time left to force overtime.

"We took advantage of our golden opportunity in the first half," Kalida coach David Kehres said. "We had a couple of other opportunities we didn't capitalize on. They got that first goal and got all kinds of momentum after that. It was just a PCL dogfight the whole game."

While Kalida's offense has struggled this season, they had two scoring opportunities early in the contest, one off a corner kick when the ball was played in front of the goal, only to have Recker pick up the loose ball. Later, Justine Verhoff made a run on goal only to be denied.

Continental seemed to take control for the next 20 minutes as they had five chances on goal only to see the shot saved, go wide or high. With eight minutes left in the half Kalida's Brittany Kahle took a shot that settled into the arms of Recker.

With just under four minutes left in the half, Verhoff took a long pass and worked her down the right side of the field to the penalty box. Verhoff got inside the box and fired a shot toward the left corner of the goal that snuck past Recker for a 1-0 Kalida lead with 3:19 left.

Two minutes later, Verhoff launched another shot at the Continental goal that was blocked by a defender. Verhoff had a second chance at the bal, but pushed the rebound wide.

The Wildcats best scoring chance in the second half came at the 25 minute mark after a long throw-in by Verhoff from the left side. The ball landed in front of the Pirate goal and two Kalida players attempted to get a foot on the ball only to miss before a Pirate defender finally cleared the ball.

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"It's been an uphill battle all year long," Kehres said. "The deck has been stacked against us with injuries all year long and we suffered another one to a starter the other night (Wednesday). But I have to give these girls credit; they have stepped up game after game. A lot of people were counting us out but we are district runners-up and they have nothing to be ashamed of; they accomplished quite a bit."