Inspired LadyCats oust Musketeers in district soccer

Written by Jim Metcalfe
Thursday, October 25, 2012 1:45 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 30, 2012 12:06 PM

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OTTOVILLE — Fort Jennings and Kalida have played many a tough girls soccer match over the years and there hasn't been much to separate them.

The two combatants met up Wednesday night in Ottoville's Division III District semifinal at Ottoville Soccer Stadium for another hard-fought affair.

It came down to one goal — similar to Kalida's 1-0 regular-season victory in Fort Jennings — and with 3-time PCL Player of the Year Summer Holtkamp on the bench due to an injury suffered late in the second half, it came from LadyCat sophomore Jackie Gardner with 5:28 left for that match-winning tally.

Kalida (17-0-1) advances to battle Coldwater at 2 p.m. Saturday in the Bath District final. The LadyCats had controlled the orb most of the way from the get-go, outshooting the Musketeers (13-2-3) 9-2, but had nothing to show for it.

Holtkamp and Gardner were thorns in the Lady Musketeer side most of the way but their chances were either wide of the mark, deflected off defenders in front of the net or nabbed by Jennings senior keeper Gabbie German (8 saves).

On the other end, the Kalida defense locked down Musketeer senior star Macy Schroeder and the rest, leaving junior netminder Sarah Verhoff very few times to make saves (2).

The Musketeers had their first shot on-goal at 21:40 of the second half as senior Kristen Maag fired from 12 yards but it deflected off a defender and into Verhoff's arms.

The best chance for Kalida in the second half — before the goal — came at the 20:06 mark when Gardner fired from 25 yards but hit the crossbar; it rebounded to Holtkamp in front of the net but her follow shot was just over the top.

With the match intensity heating up — with the partisans for both teams along for the ride — it looked like this match was meant for overtime.

The Lady Musketeers had another chance at 15:41 when Schroeder got a 25-yard free kick that sailed just over the top.

At 13:38, Holtkamp rolled her leg over the ball and the injury took the collective breath out of the large crowd watching the match. She slowly was helped from the pitch.

However, that seemed to energize the LadyCats.

"The girls could have gone 'oh no' when Summer went down but if anything, they picked up the intensity. They didn't want it to end for her because she has meant so much to this team for four years," Kalida coach Dave Kehres said. "We also wanted to show we were not a 1-girl team; we have 22 others that have made great contributions this year and tonight. However, that was just a great effort by Jackie; she was not going to be denied.

At 11:26, junior Justine Verhoff had an 8-yarder denied by German.

However, Gardner took it upon herself to put the ball in the back of the net.

At 5:28, she finished off a sequence on the right wing — helped by senior Skylar Basinger — by getting control of the orb after the Musketeers failed to clear and fired an 8-yarder hard and low to the left for the 1-0 edge.

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"I didn't even see the goal; I was worried because (senior) Lori (Bruskotter) had taken a shot to the mouth and was bleeding. I'm not sure what happened," Wagner noted. "Kalida is a good team, no doubt, and they seemed more aggressive from the start. We also chose the wrong time to not play very well. We didn't possess or pass the ball well, we were in too much of a hurry to get rid of the ball and we just weren't in sync; we never got anything going offensively. That's how they beat us last time, too; an unfortunate goal."

At 4:36, senior Kaylyn Verhoff was shook up for Kalida but left the pitch under her own power. Jennings had one more chance to try and get the equalizer but Maag's 10-yard header was denied by Sarah Verhoff.

"Too bad this was a district semifinal and not a final. We knew coming in how tough they were going to be; it was the same type of match as the first one (Sept. 7)," Kehres added. "We just showed so much resilience and heart; that's what won this match. We told the girls at the half to leave it all on the field and they did."

Wagner will bid goodbye to 10 seniors total: German, Schroeder, Bruskotter, Maag, Martina Weems, Katlin Stechschulte, Marissa Mesker, Mara Brown, Kristen Maag and Gina Stechschulte.

"We told them at the half to give it everything they have and they did," Wagner added. "This was the best group of seniors I've ever worked with in my time here as coach. They will definitely be tough to replace next fall."

Holtkamp showed that she was going to be very active from the word go, getting a 10-yarder from the left wing just 40 ticks into the match that was deflected by a defender for a corner kick, one of six for the Maroon and White (2 for the Orange and Black).

That was the pattern for most of the half; when Kalida did get looks, defenders' feet were in the way or German made the saves.

With 1:25 remaining in the first 40 minutes, Gardner and Holtkamp almost put together a nice sequence in front of the net, with the senior getting a 1-on-1 8-yarder from the middle. However, the keeper came out just enough to force a shot just wide right.