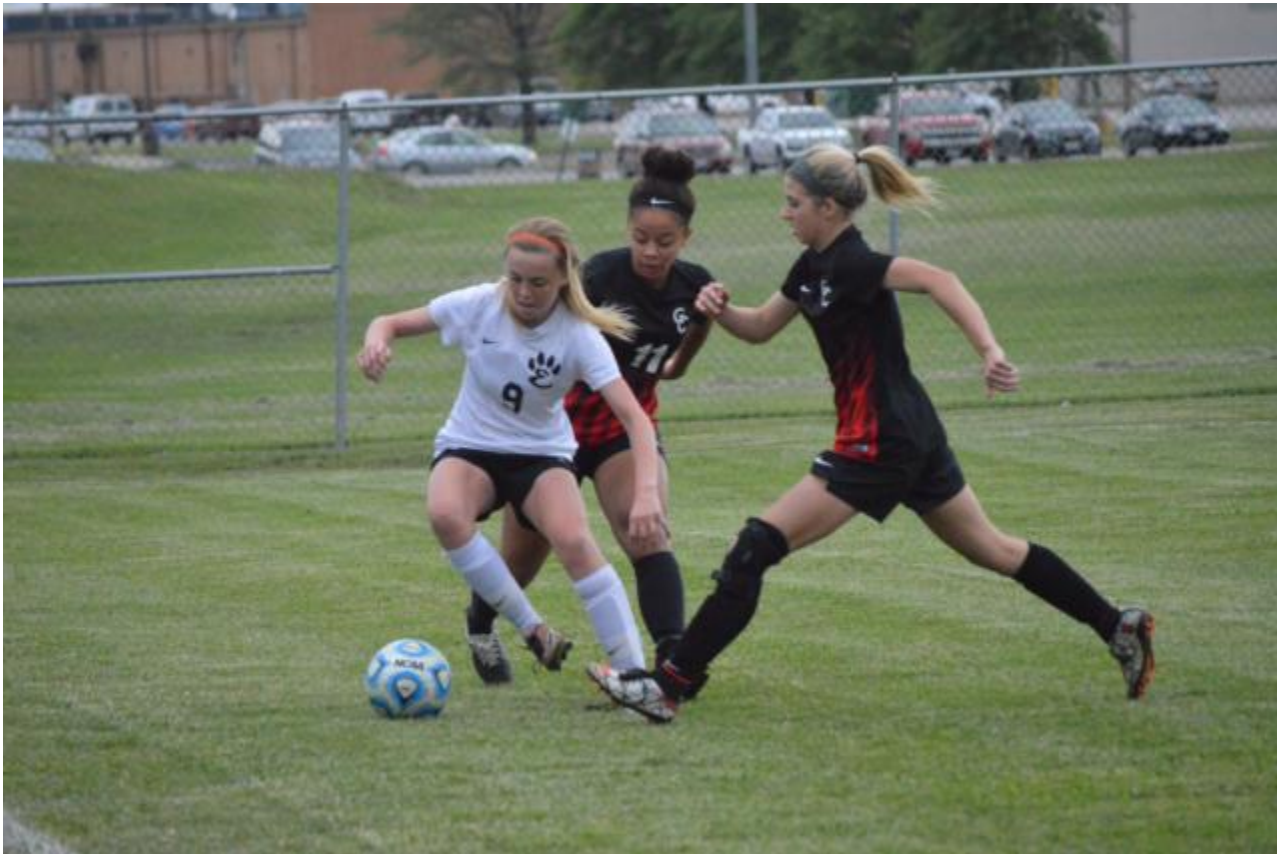


# **Tigers lose heartbreaker in regional finals to Granite City in PK shootout**

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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**GRANITE CITY** – It really doesn't matter if you're on the winning end or losing end, having to decide a postseason soccer match by a penalty-kick shootout is a cruel way to decide an outcome.

“It's always a (lousy) way to lose on PKs,” **Edwardsville coach Abby Comerford** after seeing her Tigers fell to Granite City in the IHSA Class 3A Granite City Regional final at Gene Baker Field, thanks to a shootout loss to Granite City after sending the match into extra time on an Allysiah Belt goal at the 78-minute mark; Belt drew the match level at 1-1 with her goal, but the Warriors won the shootout 3-1 thanks to some big stops from goalkeeper Neeley Wiehardt.

The Warriors, who went into the regional as the No. 6 seed, will take on the Collinsville-Alton Collinsville Regional winner at 7 p.m. Tuesday at O'Fallon in a Normal Community Sectional semifinal; the winner of that match will play for the sectional crown at 5 p.m. May 27 against the winner of the semifinal match between the Pekin and Joliet Central regionals.

“But that's part of soccer,” Comerford said about the shootout. “We had quite a few chances that just didn't go in; we just needed to capitalize on our chances. They never quit; they played the full 80 minutes. They continued to go.”

The Warriors advanced into Friday's final by winning a shootout against Belleville West and advanced to the sectional the same way. "I don't like penalty kicks myself," said **Warrior coach Ken Prazma**. "It's just really hard on the kids, I can see that, but also, you can't keep playing overtime and overtime; the kids are just too tired.

"Obviously, if you have to decide a game, penalty kicks have been taken for years; it is what it is."

The Warriors took the lead thanks to a Grace Niehardt goal off a Megan Jones throw-in to restart play in the 24<sup>th</sup> minute; Niehardt beat Edwardsville goalkeeper Regan Windau and the lead stood up almost through the rest of the match. The goal gave the Warriors some confidence. "We knew we could come out and play with them," Prazma said. "They are very skilled. I had nine freshmen on my varsity roster and about four or five of them are out on the field at the same time.

"It gives these girls great experience. The more they're out on the field and the more they're playing, it builds their confidence, especially when you're beating (one of the top teams) in the state. This is a huge win."

Belt's goal came off an assist from Jane Ann Crabtree and it came right at the 78-minute mark; Granite had held on to the lead since the Niehardt goal, but the Tigers were coming for the tying goal and nearly scored a couple of times leading to the Belt goal. Both teams had great chances in extra time, especially in the second half of the 20 minutes, but couldn't find the back of the net and saw the match head to the shootout.

The Warriors' Lexi Grote – who nearly won the match in the dying seconds of extra time for Granite but couldn't get the ball past Windau – scored to begin the shootout, with Ashlin West countering for the Tigers. Niehardt then scored on her attempt, but at that point, Wiehardt became a wall for the Warriors, turning back attempts from Abby Crabtree and then Jane Ann Crabtree while Emily Smith saw her attempt stopped by Windau.

Shelby Winn then put the Warriors up 3-1 in the shootout and force Edwardsville to score to keep the shootout alive, but Wiehardt turned Mallory Mushill's try away and clinched the shootout for Granite, sending the Warrior players and supporters into a celebratory mood.

Granite City heads into the sectional with a 10-6-4 mark; Edwardsville was eliminated at 18-3-1.

