

Alton girls soccer team off to sensational start, wins sixth match over Oakville 2-1

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Alton's girls soccer team has gotten off to a really good start to the season, winning their division of the season-opening Metro Girls Cup tournament and gaining a draw in their last match thanks to a Bri Hatfield goal against Belleville Althoff in the final seconds of the match Wednesday night.

The Redbirds took on another top team Saturday afternoon at Piasa Motor Fuels Field, taking their record to 6-1-1 on the year with a 2-1 triumph over Oakville thanks to second-half goals from Katie Kercher and Alaina Nasello. The Tigers dropped to 2-3-1 on the year.

“We played a really good first half,” said Redbird coach Jeff Hayes of his team, who trailed the Tigers 1-0 at the half. “Sometimes that's how the game goes – you're play well and you're still down 1-0 and that's because that's a really good team you're playing. I was excited to get them on our schedule because they're a great program, they've got a lot of tradition there, so for us to get a victory like this eight games into the season or so – it's big for our girls in showing confidence.

“We didn't change anything for the second half because even being down 1-0, we were still playing well. At halftime, we said 'let's not get frustrated no matter what happens, we need to make sure we play a full 40 minutes and don't give up any time just because we're frustrated.’”

The Tigers had taken the lead seconds past the half-hour Madison Poncirolli came in down the right side and tucked the ball past Redbird goalkeeper Kaija Ufert; there were no lack of chances for the Redbirds in the first 40 minutes but couldn't get the ball into the back of the net.

Alton came out after the break looking for ways to draw level with Oakville; they did just that in the 50th minute when Nasello found Katie Kercher with a pass; Kercher got the ball into the goal to draw proceedings level at 1-1. Seven minutes later, Nasello made a run to the near post, where Hatfield found Nasello with a pass and all Nasello had to do was tuck the ball away past Tiger goalkeeper Emily Jackson to put the Redbirds ahead to stay.

“Nasello making a near-post run and burying a ball that put us away was a big lift for us,” Hayes said.

Hayes is happy where the Redbirds stand at this stage of the season. “I can't complain about our record,” Hayes said. “We're off to a good start; it's just a matter of standing at the end. We've got a tough (Southwestern) conference schedule coming up, so we have game No. 2 on Monday (a 4:30 p.m. home match against Belleville East) and I think that's a big test for us.

“We look at that as a season within itself; we're excited to play East on Monday.”

Following Monday's match, Alton visits Collinsville at 4:30 p.m. Thursday, then heads to North County for a 6:30 p.m. April 18 match against Trinity.

