

Early goal sets tone as Warriors eliminate Redbirds in girls soccer regional

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
May 18 2017 6:26 AM





GRANITE CITY – A seventh-minute penalty kick set the tone for Wednesday's IHSA Class 3A Quincy Regional semifinal match between Granite City and Alton.

The Warriors' Lexi Grote sped downfield toward the Alton goal and was brought down inside the penalty area; Grote connected on the ensuing PK and gave the Warriors a 1-0 lead. From there, it was all Warriors as they eliminated the Redbirds 4-0 at Granite City's Gene Baker Field, sending GCHS to Friday's regional final against Collinsville, 10-2 winners over host Quincy Tuesday night.

The final will be played at McKendree University in Lebanon, with the winner moving into the Edwardsville Sectional against the winner of Friday's Belleville West Regional (either Edwardsville or Belleville West) at 6 p.m. Tuesday. The sectional final and trip to the Normal Community Super-Sectional is set for 6 p.m. May 26. Alton was eliminated at 12-6-2, while the Warriors move into their second straight regional final at 14-5.

“They definitely took advantage of their opportunities,” said Redbird coach Jeff Hayes. “We had some, they had some, but they capitalized and they scored some pretty goals early on.”

Hayes felt the Grote PK early on set the tone for the day. “We really wanted to take advantage of the wind (conditions throughout the match were windy) and we were getting in behind of them because of that; they countered on us and played a couple of great passes to get in and that's where Grote got in behind our center-back.

“Her speed creates problems and she got in the (penalty) box; we had nothing else we could do but take her down.”

Grote scored the Warriors' third goal in the 63rd minute when she broke loose behind the Alton defense after getting a feed, ran in and put the ball into the back of the net. “I don't think our defensive line anticipated that ball coming in so quickly,” Hayes said. “We got caught a little flat-footed and she showed some composure to take it in on goal and make the goalie commit and get it.”

The two teams had met in a Southwestern Conference match at Alton's Piasa Motor Fuels Field on May 6, the Redbirds taking a 2-1 win.

Wednesday's match was much, much different, Warrior coach Ken Prazma felt. “We played them a week and a half ago and didn't play that well,” Prazma said. “We played better in the second half (of that match) but gave up an early goal in the first half to them and I think that took them up a little bit; they kept their pace up pretty much .

“Today, we came out from the very beginning and put pressure on them, especially when they had the wind, which was a big factor; holding them scoreless in the wind was huge. The girls played very good defense.”

Grote's first goal held up through the first half; the Warriors upped the lead to 2-0 in the 48th minute when Grace Niedhart got to a Grote corner kick and scored before Grote's breakaway goal all but sealed the match in the 63rd minute. Abigail Reeves finished off the scoring in the 75th minute when she scored off a free kick.

Viktoria Johnson recorded the clean sheet for the Warriors on the day.

Long-time rivals Collinsville and Granite City will be clashing for the regional crown. “It'll be hopefully a great game; two really good teams playing against each other,” Prazma said. “It's been some pretty good battles over the last few years; Clay (Smith, the Kahok coach) has done a great job with them and they have a great bunch of seniors that want to go up to state again. We're going to try the best that we can to keep that from happening.”

Hayes felt the Redbirds made many strides this season. “Our girls are going to be disappointed about the way it ended tonight,” Hayes said, “because it's certainly not indicative of how our season went. Tomorrow, they're going to wake up with some bumps and bruises and shake it off.

“We can look back and find some really great wins and see how far we came from first game to last. We're moving in the right direction and it has everything to do with the girls' effort and attitude.”

