

Triad soccer girls determined to bring home state soccer championship

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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TROY – Triad's girls soccer team is on a mission this weekend.

And they're determined to bring home a state championship, a championship that would be the Knights' first since winning it all over Woodstock Marian Catholic (THS reached the 2003 Class A final in a two-class system, falling to Arlington Heights St. Viator).

Triad will take on Burlington Central at 1 p.m. today in an IHSA Class 2A semifinal match at North Central College in Naperville, following the other semifinal between Lemont and Wheaton Academy of West Chicago at 11 a.m. today; Friday's two winners meet at 1 p.m. Saturday for the Class 2A championship, with a third-place playoff match preceding the final at 11 a.m. Saturday.

“It's pretty exciting,” said Knight coach Matt Bettlach. “This is something we've been looking forward to. Obviously the competition is going to be very good; anybody who's made it this far is going to compete at a high level, we know that, but if we go up and just play our game, we'll be OK.. We'll have a shot, that's for sure.”

The Knights enter the semifinal match with a 20-6 record; they got to state with a 1-0 win over Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin in the Rochester Super-Sectional Tuesday; previously, they had defeated Herrin 10-1 and Marion 6-0 to win the Marion Regional to

advance to the Chatham Glenwood Sectional, where the Knights dethroned defending Class 2A champion (and 2015 Class 1A champion) Rochester 3-0 in the semfiinal and





reached the super-sectional with a 1-0 penalty-kick shootout win over the host Titans.

“That was a tough game for us,” Bettlach said of the THS win over the Rockets.

“They're fast, they're physical the way they play, they're well-coached; we spent a lot of energy in that game trying to win.

“They (Chatham) have a great facility and they got a lot of fan support; they were out in droves that night (of the sectional final). Our girls knew it wasn't going to be an easy game; they dictated the play most of the game and we hunkered down and battled and came away with the win,” with Molly Suess scoring the winning the goal in the shootout.

“It's very exciting,” to reach the state tournament, said Knight senior forward Sam Bassler, one of the team's leading scorers with 10 goals and four assists for 24 points.

“That was our main goal from the start, but we still have a lot to achieve this weekend. We'll play the best we can and try out best to achieve our goal.

“From the start, we wanted to get to this point, and being a senior, this being our first time since 2011 is pretty exciting.”





“I'm pretty excited about it,” said sophomore forward Katie Rogers, who is second on the team in scoring with 14 goals for 28 points, of the opportunity. “It's been quite awhile since we won state; it's exciting to have this opportunity to go there and have this chance to actually win it again.

“Just playing with all these girls; we've got talent and we're all working together as a team – it's just all working together” has been the key point of the Knights' season, Rogers felt. “We were hoping to get it last year, but it didn't happen; this year, it did and it's pretty exciting.”

“The Chatham game was one of the hardest ones,” said Triad junior goalkeeper Mercedes King, who enters the semifinals with an 0.41 goals-against average and having recorded 16 shutouts on the year with four solo clean sheets. “I played a really good game and I'm pretty proud of the way I played, then the game against Sacred Heart, I had to make a couple of saves; my defense and offense just played a great game.”

Being the last line of defense can be “nerve-racking”, as King put it, “knowing it it gets past me, we're down. But it's also a team effort; I'm really excited we're going to state – we worked (hard) to get here.”









“I am so excited” to get to the state tournament, said Triad leading scorer Meghan Smith, a senior who has 12 goals and 11 assists on the season for 35 points, including five match-winning goals. “I haven't slept in like three days; all I'm thinking about is going to state. That's pretty much all we've been talking about in the four years I've been in this program; it's like the pinnacle of what you can do and what you can leave your mark on at Triad.

“I'm so happy we got to this point; I'm going to be even happier when we win it all.”

The Knights won't be alone this weekend – Collinsville will also be representing the Metro-East area in the Class 3A championship in Naperville as the Kahoks, making their third straight appearance in the state tournament, take on Winnetka New Trier at 5 p.m. Friday in a semifinal match, with the 3A final set for 7 p.m Saturday. The two teams will be supporting each other over the weekend.

“Clay is a good friend of mine,” Bettlach said of Kahok coach Clay Smith. “All these girls on our team and his team, they all know each other, so we're going to meet up and hang out to celebrate and hopefully we both can come back with some hardware.”

“I actually have a lot of friends on Collinsville and it's very exciting we're going up there together,” Bassler said. “We've been texting and saying how exciting it is; we'll be watching Collinsville's game (as will the Kahoks when the Knights are playing).”

Bettlach is hoping that the Knights become known in the state following the weekend. “I received a couple of phone calls from reporters up north and they said, 'we don't know much about you',” Bettlach said. “It's kind of interesting; we're going up there as no-namers – hopefully we'll come out with everyone knowing who we are.

“If we stick to what we've done all year, what we know and how we can play, we'll be fine. We're one of four teams left in 2A – I'm pretty proud as a coach of my kids for the season we've had and getting here. We want to enjoy the moment, but we also want to try to come home with that state title.