

SIUE men's soccer season ends with loss in tournament

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November 10 2017 2:18 PM



KALAMAZOO, Mich. – SIUE men's soccer's 2017 season came to an end Friday in the semifinals of the Mid-American Conference tournament at the WMU Soccer Complex. The third-seeded Cougars dropped a 2-1 double overtime decision to No. 7 Akron. The second-seeded Zips will move on to play for the MAC Championship Sunday.

The Cougars finish the season at 7-10-1 overall. SIUE was 2-3 in first season of competition in the MAC. Akron improved to 15-3-1 with the win.

"I am absolutely proud of our guys," SIUE Head Coach Mario Sanchez said. "We wanted to come out and set the tone today and we did by coming out and attacking them."

With less than five minutes to play in the second overtime period, Akron's Stuart Holthusen took a pass from Ezana Kahsay then zig-zagged through the box before burying a right-footed shot from 12 yards away.

It looked as if SIUE would punch its ticket to the final in regulation time, but Akron got a late goal to force the extra time.

After a ball skipped out of play on the far sideline, it appeared SIUE would be awarded possession, but the Zips were given the throw-in, which came right to Nate Shultz. He delivered the ball into the box where Skye Harter headed home a cross from five yards out with 17 seconds left in the second period.

"It's an unfortunate way to end regulation with a call that just didn't go our way," Sanchez said. "We see how 17 seconds can change everything."

Following a scoreless first half, Greg Solawa put the Cougars on top in the 56th minute. An initial shot from Johan DePicker was saved by Akron goalkeeper Ben Lundt. Solawa blasted home the rebound from top of the box to the low far post.

"We showed that we can go toe-to-toe with anyone," Sanchez continued. "We're right there, but don't just want to compete, we want to win. I told the guys they can hold their heads high when they come out and compete. Today they did that."

The Cougars had a chance to end the game just minutes before Akron did. Following an Akron foul just outside the box with 8:45 left, Jorge Gonzalez lifted the free kick just over the crossbar.

"Jorge being back definitely helped," Sanchez said. "It was honestly one of our best attacking games."

Both teams had opportunities in regulation time.

The Cougars' Mohamed Awad made an attacking run down the right side and then fed the ball to Devyn Jambga who hit side of the net with 12:35 left in regulation.

"I have to give a lot of credit to Devyn," Sanchez said. "We switched his position and he had a great game. He ran himself into the ground."

Akron nearly drew even with less than five minutes to play when David Egbo got a ball at the back post but SIUE goalkeeper Kyle Dal Santo turned away his shot with a kick save.

SIUE had probably the best scoring chance in the first half. Gonzalez hit a header just wide after a cross from Jambga with just less than six minutes to play before half.

Dal Santo made two saves on Akron shots in the final five minutes of the first period.

The Zips outshot the Cougars 22-5 for the contest and had the only two shots in either overtime period.

Dal Santo made five saves. The senior finished his career with 202 saves, leaving his seventh all-time at SIUE. He also earned a school-record 27 shutouts during his career. He finished his career with nearly 5,500 consecutive minutes in goal for the Cougars.

"Kyle had a very good game," Sanchez said of his goalkeeper. "He did what he needed to do for us."

Awad, Dal Santo and Jambga were among six seniors to play their final game for SIUE. Gabe Christianson, Joel Duncan and Austin Polster also finished their careers on Friday.

"A lot of credit goes to that group and what they did for the program," Sanchez said of the departing seniors. "They have a lot to be proud of. They have left a legacy and we're sad to see them go."