

Bielicke's Goal In Extra Time Gives Edwardsville 1-0 Win Over Belleville West In Regional Semifinal, Tigers Face Granite City In Friday's Final

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EDWARDSVILLE – Hannah Bielicke scored in the 98th minute on a beautiful cross to give Edwardsville a 1-0 win over Belleville West in the IHSA Class 3A girls soccer regional tournament Wednesday afternoon at Tiger Stadium.

The Tigers advance to the final against Granite City, who won the second semifinal 1-0 over Collinsville, Friday afternoon for the right to advance to the sectional semifinal.

It was a very hard-fought match played in sunny and warm conditions, and Tigers coach Abby Federmann thought the heat may have played a factor in the performances.

“You know, we came out a little flatter than I thought we would,” Federmann said. “I think the heat may have had something to do with that. Our numbers are down; we have

a couple of injuries, but I think all-in-all, it was our bench that saved us. I was able to rotate two or three people in at each time, and it kept everybody's legs as fresh as possible, and that just kept us able to fight until that last two minutes."

Federmann gave full credit to the Maroons, who played very well and had numerous chances as well.

"They always do," Federmann said of West. "They work so hard, and their 50-50 ball air game is amazing. Gabby (Holtrop) is just a force, and they're fast. Their transition on the attack is super fast, and we had a hard time with that the first half, so we were losing the ball, not getting as many opportunities offensively. But I think it was just sheer will and desire that kept up in this game."

And in the state tournament series, it's oftentimes survive and advance, and Federmann agreed that's exactly what happened.

"Yep, that's exactly what happened," Federmann said. "We just need to look forward to Friday, and keep this momentum."

The Maroons looked particularly dangerous in the first half, with ample opportunities to break on top, but Tigers goalie Rachel Hensley was there to make the saves that thwarted the chances.

"You've got to give credit where credit's due," said West head coach Jason Mathenia. "Unfortunately, we gave up a lot of corner kicks today, and Edwardsville's good on them. Outside the course of the game, we, I felt, created a lot of opportunities, and we just couldn't find a way to find the back of the net. Early in the first half, and midway through the first half, their keeper (Hensley) made some great saves on Katelyn Grandcolas, punches them off the crossbar and out of bounds. We had our opportunities, and we just couldn't finish."

Grandcolas was the most dangerous Maroon player in the first half, having some good chances, but was stopped each time by Hensley and the Tiger defense.

"Absolutely," Mathenia said. "It seemed like they had to adjust several times to try to keep her under control, and she's got unbelievable speed and athleticism. We try to find her, getting her in dangerous moments, and I thought she did a great job by getting in those moments, and like I said, credit goes to their keeper for robbing her a couple of times out of the net."

The Maroons kept on fighting until the end, and the Maroons' fitness levels played a factor as well.

“Again, it’s one thing that we kept fighting and keep battling, and I felt that our fitness paid off for us this year,” Mathenia said, “as they had numerous players going down with cramps and everything like that. But again, they were able to find the back of the net, and we weren’t. As far as the game goes, we’ve battled through some tough times all year, and it’s very unfortunate that our record reflects what it does, because our team is much more deserving than what our record reflects, for sure.”

Mathenia is very proud of his team and all of their efforts this season.

“Oh, absolutely,” Mathenia said. “We had a couple of our starters, that have been starters all year for us that have been injured, that they wanted to play tonight. We’ve had to sit one probably the better half of the season. She got hurt early on at the Parkway (Tournament in St. Louis), and hasn’t been back to a game since. And losing (Sydney) Valerius to an injury last week. Both of them came up and said ‘we want to play, no matter what.’ They wanted to play through the pain, and they did. They did a great job.”

Both sides had some decent chances in the first 14 minutes, but were cleared away by the defenses or went wide. In the 14th minute, Grandcolas had the first big chance of the match with a great shot, but Hensley was there to deflect it over the bar. The ensuing corner fell into Hensley’s arms to keep it 0-0. Three minutes later, Grandcolas had another shot, but it went wide, and in the 21st minute, Rileigh Kuhns had a good shot that was headed clear by the Maroon defense. In the 27th minute, Brynn Miracle came up with a beautiful cross that found Bielicke in the box, but Kameryn Cortese came up with the save in the West goal to keep things scoreless.

Two minutes later, Grandcolas was sent in on a lovely through ball, but Hensley again was there to deflect Grandcolas’ shot over the top to keep things goalless. At the half-hour, Payton Federmann had a big chance for the Tigers, with her first shot being blocked, and her second attempt went wide. The Maroons then had another chance at 37 minutes, but the cross went right to Hensley. West then had one more chance right before halftime, but it went over the top as the siren went, making the halftime score 0-0.

The Tigers had the first two chances in the second half, but a shot by Bielicke from distance went right to Cortese in the 43rd minute, and two minutes later, Zoe Ahlers’ try went high and wide, keeping things scoreless. In the 47th minute, a free kick in a dangerous spot was taken by Sarah Foley, but the shot went right to Hensley. In the 51st minute, Grandcolas had a great run in the Edwardsville box, but her shot was stopped at the near post by Hensley. Right before the hour, Federmann had a shot after a great effort by Miracle, but it went past the near post to keep it scoreless.

In the 61st minute, Kuhns fed Bielicke, who scored, but the goal wasn't given due to an offside, keeping the match scoreless. In the 67th minute, Kuhns blocked a pass and almost went off on a breakaway, but the Maroon defense stopped it, then both teams went looking for a possible winner in the final 10 minutes. Baleigh Good had a go in the 73rd minute, but the Tiger defense was there to clear the ball, and in the 78th minute, the Tigers had a free kick from distance that went for naught. The siren for full time went with the score still 0-0, forcing 20 minutes of extra time.

The Tigers had a number of good chances in the first half of extra time, but were either cleared away or just failed to click, keeping the match goalless. In the second half of extra time, the Maroons had a good chance in the 93rd minute, but couldn't finish, and in the 94th minute, the Tigers had a glorious chance, but couldn't get a shot away, keeping it scoreless.

In the 98th minute, Bielicke saw a chance get pushed past the post by Cortese, but seconds later, off the ensuing corner, Kuhns put in a perfect cross, that was poked home by Bielicke to make it 1-0 for the Tigers. The Maroons had one last chance, but it was stopped as the siren went, giving the win to the Tigers.

In the second semifinal, a first-half strike by MacKenzie Hawkins was the only goal of the match as the Warriors defeated Collinsville to set up Friday's final. Claire Rendleman had eight saves for the Kahoks, while Olivia Brinker had five stops for Granite. The Warriors are now 12-5-3, while Collinsville finishes up 9-11-2.

The Maroons end their season 6-17-2, but Mathenia is very proud of his team and their efforts all season.

"Absolutely," Mathenia said. "The girls, they've persevered through some very difficult times from day one, and very, very extremely proud of them."

The Tigers improve to 13-8-0, and Federmann is looking ahead to the final, knowing that it'll be a battle.

"It's going to be a hard-fought one, too," Federmann said. "We lost to Granite just a couple of weeks ago, and Collinsville was a near loss, so it's going to be a battle."

