



Nolan Scores Early To Stun West Chicago, But Wildcats Rally For 2-1 Win After Extra Time in State Class 3A Semifinals

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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HOFFMAN ESTATES – Cooper Nolan netted his 22nd goal of the season, the most in one season for Edwardsville since Sam Fink, who played on the state championship team in 2000, and is currently the team captain for Saint Louis FC, the local pro team that plays in the United Soccer League's USL Championship league, but the Tigers conceded goals in the 71st and 81st minutes as Edwardsville lost to West Chicago 2-1 after extra time in the first semifinal of the IHSA Class 3A boys soccer finals Friday night at Hoffman Estates High School in northwest suburban Chicago.

Nolan's goal occurred in the match's second minute, a stunner that gave Edwardsville a dream start, and the defense made it stand up for nearly 70 minutes until West Chicago drew level late, and then scored in the opening minute of extra tie to help the Wildcats advance to Saturday's final.

"It was a really tough game," said Edwardsville head coach Mark Heiderscheid. "It was a great ball put in the box, and I think we stunned them early with it. It was a good goal by Cooper, who's scored over 20 goals for us this season, and it was about as good a start as you can get."

It was especially important, because the Wildcats are a team consisting of some of the best soccer talent in the nation, and the Wildcats' quality showed throughout the match.

"They may be one of the best high school teams I've ever seen," Heiderscheid said. "They're a team of some of the best club players in the country, and their ability to move the ball was some of the best I've ever seen. You have to really be proud of our kids, because they showed a tremendous amount of grit to stay in the game."

That the Tigers did, to their tremendous credit, and the result was as good of a match as anyone could hope for, with so much on the line for both sides.

"It just took that one moment that they put it in," Heiderscheid said, "because they were consistently putting 40-yard diagonal balls on someone's foot. It's not like some teams playing kickball, but something you'd see on Saturdays in the top European leagues. And their ability to beat players on the dribble is quite impressive."

With everything being said, the Tigers put on an incredible and impressive performance for the entire 100 minutes, and Heiderscheid couldn't be any prouder of his players.

"For 100 minutes, we were so close to putting one away," Heiderscheid said, "but after they put one away, we kept our composure, and in the second half of extra time, Brennan Weller struck a ball that their keeper had to make a miraculous save on that I thought that would send us to penalty kicks."

And Heiderscheid is very happy with and proud of his team's effort throughout the match.

“Definitely, because the result and the character to hang in a game like this is phenomenal,” Heiderscheid said. “Their coach (Jose Villa) is a great guy, and he told me he was really impressed, and that we were the most disciplined team he's faced all season.”

Nolan's goal occurred in the second minute, as he took a Logan Loftus pass, and turned it into a wonder strike, which connected with the back of the net to put the Tigers up 1-0. The Edwardsville defense, and goalie Tyler Frolik, worked hard to keep it that way, with Frolik diving out to rob Jessie Hernandez of an equalizer in the first half, and doing the same thing to Moises Morfin in the second.

But Morfin would score in the 71st minute with a goal that brought West Chicago level at 1-1, which is where it stayed for the rest of regulation, forcing 20 minutes of extra time.

It didn't take long for the Wildcats to strike themselves. With only 45 seconds having gone in extra time, Morfin found striker Brian Nieves, and Nieves made no mistake in finding the back of the net to give the Wildcats a 2-1 lead that they'd never give up.

Weller's late shot attempt was foiled by West Chicago keeper David Kuehn to preserve the win for West Chicago.

Frolik made 12 saves in the match, two saves short of an IHSA state tournament record for most saves in a match.

West Chicago is now 23-2-3, and will face Berwyn-Cicero Morton, who defeated Chicago St. Patrick 4-2 in the second semifinal, in the state final Saturday night at 7 p.m. The Tigers, now 21-5-3, go up against Shamrocks in the third and fourth place match, starting at 5 p.m. It will be a tough task for Edwardsville, but they will be up to the challenge.

“That's going to be tough, because we've got a lot of worn-out kids,” Heiderscheid said. “But we'll step on the pitch and try.”

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)