

Baca Opens Season Account With Hat Trick As Edwardsville Defeats Althoff Catholic 3-0 In Metro Cup Curtain Raiser At Home

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Senior striker Olivia Baca connected with three goals, with her first two coming one minute apart, as the Edwardsville girls soccer team opened its 2022 season with a 3-0 win over Belleville Althoff Catholic in their first game of the annual Metro Cup showcase Monday night at Tiger Stadium.

The Tigers clicked on all cylinders in their win over the defending IHSA Class 1A state champions, playing solid defense to go along with enterprising and attacking soccer in the forward half, controlling play for the biggest part of the match.

"I'm feeling good," said Edwardsville head coach Abby Federmann after the match. "I have a really great opportunity to see what I'm working with, there's a lot of new girls on this team, we've got six freshmen and then a couple of sophomores, so I was able to work through that. Coming out against a state championship team for the first game is always a little anxiety-ridden, but scoring early really helped our confidence."

The combination of senior Payton Federmann and Baca was a dangerous one all night, as the two combined for various chances throughout, and it's definitely a very good sign for the Tigers going forward.

"Yeah, they're going to be a nice dual there," Abby Federmann said. "Add Kylie Peel into that mix, so she's a sophomore playing an attacking (midfielder) for us right now.

Once they start combining and really getting to know each other, it's unstoppable, for real."

The six freshmen on the roster - Blakely Hockett, Ayla Hohmann, Rachel Kretzer, Mea Hook, Ellie Neath and Olivia Kennedy - will add much youth and provide much spark for the team this season.

"Yeah, I could see them all getting a lot of minutes," Federmann said, "and they're all very versatile, so they're going to be in a lot of different positions. And coming in as a freshman and playing for a program like this, getting to see some playing time, they're each competing, they all want it and as long as we can put together as a team, this team could go really far."

It didn't take long for Edwardsville to establish itself offensively, as a pair of through balls found their mark, but Crusader goalie Anna Brewer was there to stop the attacks. In the sixth minute, Baca took a good pass from Sydney Lane and put the ball in the back of the net to give Edwardsville a 1-0 lead. Almost immediately, after seven minutes, Baca got her second of the night from distance, with a sizzling shot beating Brewer to the near post to double the Tigers' lead to 2-0.

For the rest of the half, the Federmann-Baca combo was the most dangerous on the pitch, as the two combined for various chances on the Althoff goal, many of the shots just going past the post on either side. Anna Erber, Macie Hockett and Blakely Hockett all had good chances through the half, but couldn't find the back of the net. Later on, Baca was booked in the 35th minute, but the half ended with the Tigers up 2-0.

Federmann, Baca and Ulla Sharp picked up as the second half started, all having good opportunities that were turned away. The Crusaders also started to pick up their play early on, but the Edwardsville defense turned back each attack as the score stayed at 2-0. In the 58th minutes, Baca took a shot that was saved by Brewer, but the ball bounced away into the Althoff penalty area, with Baca following up on the rebound to score her hat trick goal, putting the Tigers up 3-0. The Crusaders did have some good chances late, but Kaitlyn Naney in goal and the Edwardsville defense stood tall to preserve the 3-0 win.

Naney made five saves in goal to record her first clean sheet of the season.

The Crusaders open up at 0-1-0, while Edwardsville starts off 1-0-0 and hosts Rochester in their second game of the showcase Wednesday night with a 5:30 p.m. kickoff. Of course, the goals for the Tigers remain the same as usual.

"Obviously, we want to win conference and move our way through the playoffs," Federmann said. "It's a state-caliber team, no doubt, but we've just got to take it one game at a time and use this Metro Cup to kind of find our groove and then, start conference play next week."

Still, Federmann is very happy to get the first three points of the season for the Tigers, and is looking ahead to see what the team can do for the 2022 season.

"Yeah, I mean, Baca, she's money," Federmann said. "She's going to get the ball at 20 (yards) and it's going to go in. So, I'm really proud of the team for working behind her, getting her those opportunities and her finishing them."



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