

Baker's Brace Not Enough As Triad Holds Off Redbirds Thanks To Ayrán's Late-Game Heroics

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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TROY – The Triad Knights watched a two-goal halftime lead slip away but thanks to sophomore forward Alina Ayrán's 73rd-minute strike, they were able to salvage a 3-2 win over Alton Saturday afternoon.

In another much-anticipated non-conference game for both teams, Triad was the team to strike first. They did so when senior forward Laney Harshany headed home a goal from fellow senior forward Gabbie Wood's cross in the 18th minute.

A little over 10 minutes later, the Knights doubled their lead. In the 27th minute, junior forward Ella George powered a shot past Alton senior keeper Peyton Baker. The ball fell to her feet after a corner kick. Alton couldn't get the ball out and Triad made them pay.

Even with the goals, the first half was still a back-and-forth affair, it just didn't see Alton get on the board.

Some halftime adjustments quickly changed that for the Redbirds.

The first good chance of the second half belonged to Triad when Wood drilled the crossbar from about 25 yards out in the 45th minute. Not much later senior forward Emily Baker pounced onto a loose ball and cut Triad's lead in half.

After this goal, the game really opened up, much to the advantage of the speedy Alton Redbirds.

Moments later sophomore midfielder Lyndsey Miller had a shot just go high and wide in the 50th minute.

Harshany got a head on corner kick in the 53rd minute but the chance sailed over the bar.

In the 63rd minute, Alton caught a little bit of a break. An unfortunate bounce for Triad awarded the Redbirds a penalty after a handball infraction.

Emily Baker stepped up and was always going to score. She tied the game back up at two all with her eighth goal of the season.

Ayran's goal came nearly 10 minutes later after a defensive lapse from Alton. Ayran got the ball, turned with it to beat a defender, and put it in the upper left corner over Peyton Baker who was a bit off her line.

"We had a nice build up and Alyna got in behind the defenders and was one-on-one with the keeper and she buried the shot," Triad head coach Matt Bettlach said postgame. "As a sophomore, to play under control like that is big time. She did a very good job of getting herself open."

Bettlach was happy all around about his team's performance Saturday afternoon.

"That was a very good Alton team. I feel like our girls have kind of been on the bad end of some things in the games that we've played, so for them to come out and get a win over a really good team is hopefully going to build some confidence as we move on from here."

Triad came into this game 1-3 on the year with losses to some quality opposition including defending state champions and 3A Southwestern Conference powerhouses but picked up a much-needed moral boost by beating Alton.

"They needed some confidence," Bettlach said about his team.

The game was always interesting, especially after Baker put Alton back in it.

"You can mark her all you want; she's still going to find the space and do what she does best. She's got the speed; she's got the skill and she can hit from anywhere," Bettlach added about Alton's dangerous striker Emily Baker.

The Baker sisters play club soccer with Harshany for St. Louis Scott Gallagher and are all good friends.

For Alton head coach Gwen Sabo, mixed feelings.

"Obviously, I don't enjoy losing and I think that was a game we could have won, but I'm very proud of them for battling back from a 2-0 deficit though. That's tough to do against any team. Triad is a very good team, so I'm very proud of the effort," Sabo said.

Alton got off to a slow start the other night in a narrow 1-0 win over Belleville West. The Redbirds had a similar start Saturday afternoon and it cost them.

"I was hoping we would show up to play aggressively from the start and get a win on the road. Unfortunately, it's taking a bit to get going," Sabo added.

This was both teams' third game of the week, the difference being that Triad has some serious depth.

"I don't have a deep bench," Sabo mentioned. "Some of them don't come off the field."

Players like Emily Baker, Lyndsey Miller, and others aren't subbed often, if at all during important matchups. Triad subbed often keeping fresh legs in the game and it led to a game-winner.

After a fun non-conference weekend game for both sides, it's back to business in their respective conferences next week.

The Redbirds will travel to unbeaten O'Fallon on Tuesday with a 6:30 p.m. kick-off.

Triad plays Granite City on Monday before opening Mississippi Valley play against Mascoutah and eventually Waterloo.