

Anselm's Late-Game Heroics Lead Explorers Past Redbirds – Rivalry Game Sees Great Turnout

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – It was decided before kick-off between the two head coaches, this game wasn't going to end in a tie.

An immediate penalty kick shootout would've decided the rivalry girl's soccer game between Alton and Marquette Catholic Friday night at Public School Stadium, if needed.

But it was the Explorers' sophomore forward Ella Anselm's late goal with just 13 seconds left in the game to go on to a dramatic 2-1 win over the Redbirds.

"Obviously, I'm very pleased we got the result, but if this thing would've went to penalty kicks, I would've still been smiling regardless," Marquette head coach Brian Hoener said.

He was a little lost for words postgame about the goal-scorer.

In a play that seemed to start out of nothing, Marquette went downfield in a flash. A through ball made it to Anselm's feet with her back to the goal. She turned and used her speed to beat the exhausted Alton defense and slot home her 18th goal of the season, but none more important than that one.

"That was crazy. I had no idea what was going on, I don't even think I was breathing when I took that shot," Anselm said postgame.

Of her goals this season, that was her fourth game-winner.

"I had a bad feeling," Alton head coach Gwen Sabo said to herself in the final 15 minutes of the game.

"They were not slowing down, their momentum was still building, and you could see our bodies were tired, we were falling apart, girls are not getting back defensively, and I had a bad feeling."

The Redbirds, dealing with injuries and a limited bench, looked to be out of gas in the final 20 minutes or so of the game.

"It's a heartbreaker at the end," Sabo said.

The result brings Marquette up to 12-2-1 on the season while Alton is now 8-4-1.



It was 63 degrees and sunny at kick-off with Marquette wearing blue as the home team, and Alton in its away white uniforms.

It was senior midfielder Clare Antrainer with the first real chance of the game in the 10th minute when her shot went wide.

Around the 20-minute mark, Alton began to gain some momentum after a couple of corner kicks. The Redbirds connected on some aerial chances, but none on target. Still, they put pressure on Marquette's back line, which led to the first goal of the game.

In the 24th minute, senior forward Emily Baker used her speed to separate herself and get a shot past senior goalkeeper Hannah Marshall to go ahead 1-0.



The lead did not last long.

Three minutes later senior midfielder Aela Scruggs put in a dangerous short cross through the six-yard box and waiting there to smash it home was sophomore forward Maya Stephan to tie the game back up at one all.

Senior goalkeeper Peyton Baker had to make a leaping save against Anselm to push the ball over the bar in the 29th minute. On the ensuing corner kick, Baker catches the ball and immediately punts it downfield to her sister who gets a good shot off that's saved by Marshall.

The game went into halftime all tied up.

Alton's best chance of the second half came in the 64th minute when Baker drilled the crossbar.

"She's a handful," Hoener said of Emily Baker. "You can't stop her; you just have to manage her."

With both teams growing tired by the minute, Marquette used one last gasp to grab the game-winner and cap off a special night.

“It was a hell of a soccer game, let’s be honest,” Hoener said.

“You’ve got two teams in the same community just going after each other, back and forth, back and forth. They got great players; we got great players. It was just a great night, a heck of an event.”

This year’s dramatic win comes after last season’s 7-0 loss to the Redbirds.

“It’s a fun event for the kids. I was on the other end of this last year, so I know it’s not fun when you don’t get the result, but this was a heck of a soccer game,” Hoener added.

An estimated crowd of several hundred got their money’s worth, but more importantly, showed their loyalty to these schools.

“A lot of fans, and this is what we expect,” Hoener said.

“They have a really good team; we have a really good team. They support their team well; we support our team well. This is why we put the game together.”





“That was very nerve-racking,” Anselm said about the spectators.

“When I was warming up, I was so nervous. I just kind of tuned them out when I’m playing though.”

With an injured and tired Redbird team, still, coach Sabo is never one for an excuse.

“They weren’t sticking to the game plan,” she said simply.

“Our team, the entire first half, wouldn’t kick the ball into space, all we would do is play the ball to the center backs. They have three girls marking Emily , which I mean, kudos to them, that’s the best you can do, that’s what you have to do. She is a very good player. But, if you play it into space and make it a foot race, I’m confident Emily is going to score more goals.”

She’s right. Baker, usually the fastest player on the field, but given a run for her money Friday night by Anselm, is so deadly because of her speed.

“You give her a sliver, and she’s going to put the ball in the back of your net,” Hoener said about Baker.

“She looks like she’s shot out of a cannon sometimes,” he added.

Baker still leads the team with 16 goals this season.

Sabo wants to make the most of this loss and use it as motivation heading forward.

“I said, please remember this feeling,” she told her players after the game.



After all the fun that was had Friday night, both of these teams are back to business next week with daunting schedules.

For the Redbirds, they’ll play three times next week, all at home. They’ll play Granite City (8-2) on Tuesday, Edwardsville (8-3) on Thursday, and Civic Memorial (10-4) on Friday for Senior Night.

For the prevailing Explorers, their upcoming schedule consists of five games in six days.

They’ll host Gibault (6-8) on Monday, be at Father McGivney (8-4-2) on Tuesday, at Metro-East Lutheran (6-10) on Thursday, host Hillsboro (10-4) on Friday, and at Maryville Christian (1-9) on Saturday.