

Katie Stark Negates Injury, Nets Game-Winner On Senior Night – Is An Auto Butler Athlete Of The Month For Alton

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – Just a week prior, in a heartbreaking 2-1 loss against cross-town rivals Marquette Catholic, it wasn't a great night for the Redbirds, especially senior captain Katie Stark.

She went down hard in the 34th minute, initially holding her shoulder, and would not return to the game.

A postgame interview with head coach Gwen Sabo declared that Stark had suffered a concussion.

She missed the next two games against tough Granite City and Edwardsville sides and was at first unsure if she'd even be cleared for her Senior Night game.

Alton athletic trainer Andy Renner did not clear her to play the day before against the Tigers but ruled her able to play last Friday.

It came as a relief to her, and a struggling Alton team that missed her presence in the midfield.

So, she made the start against Civic Memorial last Friday on Senior Night, a game where Alton celebrated seven seniors and salvaged a 2-1 win.

Stark has been a varsity player her entire high school career and is committed to continue playing at Lewis and Clark next Fall where she plans to study Engineering.

Friday night was always going to be a game she'd remember for the rest of her life, but even more so with the way it ended.

The game was tied up at 1-1 down the stretch, thanks to an early Alton goal from senior forward Emily Baker and a strike from the area's leading goal scorer junior Abriana Garrett for CM.

The game reached fever pitch in the 72nd minute when Stark received the ball, made a nice step-over move to gain separation, and blasted a left-footed shot into the upper corner, out of reach of CM keeper Sydney Moore.

For scoring the game-winning goal on Senior Night, Katie is an Auto Bulter Athlete of the Month for the Redbirds.

Stark could hardly believe she had scored with her opposite foot.

"I was so excited. I hit it and the whole team just started yelling."

“A 1-1 tie was definitely intense. In the second half we were looking for a win, Senior Night, and everyone wanted it. I was so happy when I hit it and saw it go in the corner,” she said.

Her team’s back line did its job to close out the game as her goal went on to be the game-winner. It was her first goal this season and just the second of her career. The other came back on June 1, 2021, her sophomore season, in an 11-0 win over Springfield Southeast.

Stark helped the Redbirds to their best-ever season in 2022, a 17-5 record and a second-place finish in the Southwestern Conference. Yet her team still had an early postseason exit and she knows it.

“Last year, we didn’t do what we needed to do and this year I really hope we can put our heads in the game and get some wins.”

Alton went out in the Regional Finals against Edwardsville in a close 2-1 game.

This season, it’s a bit of a different story for the Redbirds, arguably a more difficult one.

This season’s playoff brackets are out, and Alton is seeded a No. 4 in its respected Sub-Sectional. They’ll take on No. 6 Belleville East on Tuesday, May 16 at 7 p.m. in O’Fallon. Should they win, they’ll more than likely have to beat No. 1 O’Fallon on their home field in the Regional Finals.

It’s a tough ask, but Stark says that she and her team are up for the challenge.