

Triad Shocked By Titans – Knights Fall In Super-Sectional

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CHATHAM – It won't be a dream three-peat for the Triad High School girls soccer program.

After what started as a back-and-forth IHSA Class 3A Super-Sectional against the Chatham Glenwood Titans (20-4-1), it turned out to be a 5-0 defeat for the Knights, ending their season one win away from a fourth straight appearance at the state tournament.

This season was different than years past for the Triad program. The team didn't break a .500 record until April 24 when they found themselves 7-7-2. They proceeded to win nine out of their next 10 matches until going out against Chatham, ending the 2023 season with a 15-8-3 record.

"The way this team started, I think after the first few weeks of the season, a lot of people gave up on us," Triad head coach Matt Bettlach said.

"Our goal was to be the best team in May, and we battled through some injuries. We got hot, got everybody back right in time for postseason and we were playing some good soccer, but today we just ran out of gas."

The Knights weren't without their chances early on in the Super-Sectional Tuesday evening on Chatham's grass field, something becoming all the more rare.

The best chance Triad had came within the first few minutes when senior midfielder Caty Burton got a head on junior forward Libby Blixt's cross but put it just wide.

A combination of the thick grass field and near 90-degree weather seemed to take a toll on the visitors, but it was still a close game at halftime although trailing 1-0.

It was sophomore Rylann Law who had a day she'll never forget. She netted all five goals for her team, one in the first half and the other four in quick succession during the final 40 minutes.

She doubled her team's lead in the 56th minute and went on a brief rampage, scoring four goals within 15 minutes. After today, Law has 38 goals on the season.

"We didn't do a good job of defending the long ball and getting it through to their number 10 up top. First half, we turned the ball over a lot in the midfield, and off she went," Bettlach said.

Triad, the majority of the time being a possession-based team, did not have a lot of it on Tuesday. Chatham's constant high press prevented the Knights from working the ball out of the back and moving it around the way they wanted.

It all culminated in a game that was much closer than its lopsided scoreline suggests.

Looking back at the past few seasons, Chatham has had Triad's number.

In the last three postseasons, the Titans were eliminated by Triad. In 2019 the Knights won 2-1 in the Sectional Finals, while in 2021 and 2022 Triad won by scores of 2-0 each time in the Super-Sectionals on the way to back-to-back state titles.

The Titans finally got a little bit of that revenge and are back in the final four for the first time since 2015 where they finished second at state.

For Triad, the result came as a complete surprise this time around.

“I don’t want to say it was a disappointing effort because I think our girls left it on the field, but not the score I thought it was going to be,” Bettlach said.

The Knights graduated 12 seniors including regular starters like Jackie Barkus, Tavey Duncan, Laney Harshany, Karen Speer, and Burton to name a few.

During their span over the last four seasons, including freshman year’s COVID-19 pandemic canceled season, the Knights have won three Regional titles, three Sectional titles, two Super-Sectionals titles, and two state titles. They’ve won the Mississippi Valley Conference outright every year over the course of a combined 64-9-4 record.

“Special group,” Bettlach said about his seniors.

“People are going to look at what they’ve done with wins and loses and state championships, but what people don’t know is that they’re just a fabulous group of kids.”