

Triad Comes Back To Win Fourth Straight Sectional Title

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
October 28 2023 12:01 PM



FREEBURG – Counting out the pandemic season, the Triad High School boys soccer team won their fourth straight IHSA Class 2A sectional title.

Friday night at Freeburg High School, the Knights (22-1-1) defeated the Althoff Catholic Crusaders (21-5-1) by a score of 3-1, and it was a game filled to the brim with drama right from the beginning.

Just 1:18 into the game, Althoff found a breakthrough. In a play that seemingly started out of nothing, senior forward Hank Gomric won the ball just inside half field. He took some touches out wide before bodying off a Triad defender, cutting in toward net, and letting his shot go past the diving Courtlan Dellamano.

Confused by what just happened, Triad did what they do best, keep working.

Just 50 seconds later, the Knights equalized.

On a fast break down the left-hand side, senior midfielder Gibson Hunt delivered an inch-perfect, low-driven cross into the six-yard box right to the feet of senior forward Wyatt Suter who knocked it home.

Shortly after that goal, the skies, and the game, opened up.



In the pouring rain, Triad began to gain a little momentum. Suter had a chance to double the lead but instead, his shot rang off the crossbar. In the 26th minute, Triad had some good looks after a deep, flip-throw-in into the box, but couldn't muster up anything on net.

The Knights would grab the lead right before halftime, with just 38 ticks left on the clock. Another dangerous ball was delivered into the box toward Suter. He managed to flick it on past the goalkeeper before it deflected off of senior midfielder Landen Travnicek and in to make it 2-1.

Althoff head coach Skip Birdsong knew that spelled bad news for his team.

“As my old high school coach said, the beginning and end of halves are dangerous, and that one certainly was,” he said. “ played all the way through. Credit to them, they are a great team.”

For Triad, they weren’t going to go out and try to defend that lead for 40 minutes, they wanted to put the game to bed.



The Knights were a little fortunate in the second half. As the rain went away, the winds began to pick up, strongly in favor of Triad. They used it to their advantage.

“We’re going to play smart,” Triad head coach Jim Jackson said about the second half. “A one-goal lead, even two goals in a game like this is dangerous. Althoff’s a good team, we had a 1-0 game with them earlier this year at our place. We wanted to play our game, but we wanted to be smart.”

In one of the wildest sequences, the teams managed to hit the woodwork three times in four minutes to open up the second half.

In the 45th minute, Hunt rang a shot off the crossbar. Not even a minute later, junior forward Lance Stauffer’s effort from about 35 yards out drilled the bar as well.

Althoff thought they had caught a break and began to go the other way before they hit the bar in the 49th minute.

Finally, in the 55th minute, the Knights sealed the deal when junior defender Jake Palmer put one away from a well-delivered corner kick.

Suter, Hunt, and senior midfielder Cory Warren recorded assists.

Hunt and Warren are also kickers for the school’s football team who upset No. 4 seed Mahomet-Seymour by a score of 20-19 the same night. The Knights were seeded No. 13 in Class 5A.

Hunt drilled a go-ahead field goal last week as the Knights went on to beat Collinsville 36-35.

Back to the soccer game, coach Jackson always knew this was going to be a tough matchup. The Crusaders won back-to-back sectional titles in Class 1A before getting bumped up due to the IHSA’s success factor.



“We stayed and watched them play Waterloo the other night,” Jackson said of his opposition. “Waterloo and us are always physical, so we knew it was going to be a physical game, but our kids kept their mouths shut and did what they were supposed to do.”

“This year, we had a lot of questions after ’21, and then ’22 we were very successful, lost the super-sectional, lost some really nice players last year,” Jackson continued.

“This is a great feeling because these boys have worked, and worked, and worked. We knew Althoff plays a high-pressure game, and we possessed so well and knocked the ball around.”

The story of this postseason has been Suter's goal-scoring. After tonight he's up to nine goals this postseason. Nine goals in the last four games, 31 goals total on the season.



“It’s funny, he broke his brother’s record the other night,” coach Jackson mentioned. “The kid just works hard; he’s got a nose for the goal.”

Wyatt surpassed his older brother Tobey’s single-season goal mark of 28 after a four-goal performance to win the regional title over Highland in a 6-1 landslide in Effingham just a week ago.

In real-time, Triad’s second goal against Althoff seemed to come off the foot of Suter, but he clarified postgame.

“The first one, it was a great ball by Gib , the keeper came out and got two hands on it, but I was at the right place at the right time.”

According to him, on the second goal, the ball deflected off of Travnicek as he went tumbling over the keeper.

One thing is for certain, the Knights are moving on.

They will take on the winner of the Rochester sectional, either the hosts Rochester or Champaign Central. The super-sectional game is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Oct. 31 at Jacksonville High School.

