

Nov. 3 CJ III Girls Soccer: 'Stars loss not an end, but a beginning



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Andrea Costantini (left) and Kaitlyn Ragolia, who provided veteran leadership for a young Nottingham team this season, are the only seniors the Northstars will lose after their stirring state tournament appearance (Photos by Wes "The Media Mogul" Kirkpatrick (left) and John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportphoto@aol.com).

'Stars courageous state tournament run ends in heart-wrenching fashion

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Nov. 3: Dana Davies couldn't have put it any simpler.

"That was a tough, tough way to lose," said Davies after Nottingham High's girls' soccer team suffered a heart-breaking Central Jersey Group III defeat in Matawan today. "I mean, penalty kicks are the worst thing ever."

And penalty kicks are how it was decided after the 15th-seeded Northstars and seventh-seeded Huskies played to a 1-1 tie through regulation and two overtimes.

As if that wasn't nerve-racking enough, it was still tied after each team made two out of five penalty kicks in the normal round, setting up a sudden death shootout.

Matawan converted on its first chance. Davies nailed one into the far right corner that Huskie goalie Karen David dove to make the same on, ending Nottingham's season in gut-wrenching fashion.

What made things worse is that the Northstars (4-15) felt they definitely had the better of the play for long stretches of the match.

“We dominated the entire overtime,” assistant coach Staci Adams said. “We kept shooting, but we were unlucky.”

“I definitely think we outplayed them,” Davies said. “At the end of the two overtimes you could tell that we left our hearts out on the field. Despite losing in PKS, we worked amazing as a team and put up a good fight.”

Matawan (11-7-1) took a 1-0 lead on a well placed direct kick by Ashley Beccia in the second half. But with 17:35 left in regulation, Kristina Ragolia knocked a ball to the flag that Davies possessed. She put a move on the defender and launched a shot into the back of the net.

After Nottingham had a flurry of shots go wide in OT, Ragolia and Davies both connected in the shootout to counteract the two goals by Matawan.

But David downed Davies to end it.

“I’ve lost in PKs before, but never in sudden death PKs,” Davies said. “Penalty kicks aren’t easy for the keeper or the player taking the shot. It puts so much pressure on both. Plus you have to block out the crowd on top of that.”

The Northstars were looking for their second straight upset after having beaten second-seeded Allentown on Tuesday. In defeat, the Northstars showed they belonged in the tournament despite a losing record.

“They played really well,” Adams said. “(Goalie) Chelsea Toscano had a magnificent game (11 saves) and played tough. We prepared for this, we knew it could go into PKs and we worked on them in practice. We dominated most of the overtimes but just couldn’t finish.”

Davies is symbolic of the toughness, hunger and desire the Northstars had. She played through a knee injury all season and had surgery scheduled for this past Tuesday. When Nottingham beat Allentown, she re-scheduled the surgery for next week in order to remain with the team.

“We are all pretty proud of ourselves despite the loss,” Davies said. “I’m proud of how we all played today. We came out wanting to win. We put up a hard fight.

“Coming into states this year kind of gave us some experience for next year and I think we probably shocked a lot of teams with how far we got with the record we had. Like coach (Elyse) Diamond always says, ‘Your record doesn’t matter anymore, it’s a clean slate.’”

From the ashes of defeat, however, rises an extremely young team that can’t help but be excited about next year. Kaitlyn Ragolia and Andrea Costantini are the lone seniors on the team, and Kristina Ragolia and Davies are both sophomores.

“They obviously showed their potential that they can do it,” Adams said. “They struggled during the year but know they’re capable playing with these teams. Once they got a little momentum they saw how far they could go.”

In fact, this may not be an end, but a beginning.

“I’m definitely excited for next year,” Davies said. “Our team is like a family, this year made us closer. I love this team. They’re basically like my second family.”

It’s a family that’s feeling a lot of pain mixed with pride at the moment.

But when they have the family reunion next August, they will look back on this, and move forward confident that better days are ahead.