

Oct. 31 CJ III Girls Soccer



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Kaitlyn Diamond (center) is mobbed by her teammates after scoring her second goal of the game to seal Nottingham's upset win in Allentown today (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Look out state tournament world, the No. 15 Northstars have come alive!

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Oct. 31: Wow!

That's probably not the most creative way to start a story but. . . .wow!

In what probably ranks as the biggest upset victory in coach Elyse Diamond's 23-year coaching career, the 15th-seeded Nottingham High girls soccer team stunned second-seeded Allentown, 2-0, today in an NJSIAA Central Jersey Group III first-round game.

It was Nottingham's first state game in five years and it's first state victory since beating Red Bank 1-0 at Mercer Park in 2003 (followed by a loss to Hopewell in the second round).

"It's incredible," said Kaitlyn Diamond, the coach's daughter, who had both goals. "Having three wins and beating a second-seeded team, it was awesome."

Fullback Andrea Costantini, one of just two seniors on the team along with fellow defender Kaitlyn Ragolia, has been waiting a long time for something like this.

"It means sooo soo much," she said. "We worked so hard this whole season. We had some tough losses but this made it worth it."

"I'm so proud of everyone. Everyone played their heart out and put in a good effort."

Diamond converted a first-half cross from Sara Eggert and a second-half corner kick to give the Northstars (4-14) both of their goals as they avenged a 4-0 loss to the Redbirds (14-6-1) on Sep. 26.

"We played them early on," said Elyse Diamond, drenched from the water cooler shower she was given. "Everyone was in different positions today from the first time we played them. We made some adjustments since then."

Nottingham, which had lost five out of six entering the game, will travel to 7th-seeded Matawan, a 1-0 winner over Hamilton West, on Thursday.

Having lost five games by one goal and five more by two, Nottingham knew it was a better side than its record indicated.

"We played great all season," Kaitlyn Diamond said. "All our losses were by a couple of goals, or a couple bad minutes."

"Our record really doesn't represent the season that we had," Elyse Diamond said. "We've dominated games that we've lost."

After Chelsea Toscano made five straight saves to keep Allentown off the board, Nottingham struck with 19:40 remaining, when Eggert sent a perfect cross to Diamond on the right side of the goal, and the junior sent it into the long side.

"I was so happy," Diamond said. "I knew our defense was strong and we could hold on after that."

And so they did. It remained a one-goal game until 5:24 was left, when Eggert's corner kick from the left side bounced out of a pack to Diamond, who again went long side for a huge insurance goal.

"Sara and I work really well together," Kaitlyn said. "We've been playing together since we were seven. We just have good chemistry on the field."

From there it was up to Nottingham's defense, which played outstanding all day behind Toscano (11 saves) sweeper Val Suto, Ragolia, Costantini and Marissa Colon.

The Northstars had blown a few leads this year and let a 2-0 lead slip away at Allentown in a loss last year, but they learned from those mistakes.

"All the girls except our freshmen knew what happened when we came here last time," Elyse Diamond said. "We weren't going to let up in the second half. We dominated the second more than the first. We've been really trying to focus on the second half and we were running on all four cylinders today."

Allentown, which was shut out for the third time in the last four games, tried to push near the end but was stopped by defenders' deflections or one of Toscano's 11 saves. Suto seemed to be everywhere when the ball came near the danger zone, and Dana Davies took a ball to the face that forced her out late in the game.

"It got rough, but if I got pushed down I'm not gonna go back and foul them again," Suto said. "I can't do that as the sweeper. We just handled it well."

Suto felt the difference between this game and the earlier loss to Allentown was just a matter of experience for a team with just two seniors.

"It's the end of the season, we 've played a lot of games now," she said. "We knew what we needed to do, we talked about what we needed to do."

"We have more experience now. We communicated, we sent the ball to the corners, to the flags."

When asked how this one ranked among her athletic achievements, Suto grinned.

"This is almost as good," she said, "as beating Steinert in softball last year."

Almost as good when discussing township superiority.

But in the grand scheme of things, a heck of a lot more noteworthy when it comes to getting positive attention from around the state.

West comes up short in attempt to make it an All-Township quarterfinal

A bounce here or there, and Hamilton West would have been the place to be on Thursday afternoon.

But the 10th-seeded Hornets could not create a quarterfinal match-up with Nottingham, as it dropped a 1-0 decision at seventh-seeded Matawan today.

"I know it would have been really cool and the girls would have been excited," coach Anthony Tessein said of a Hornet-Northstar rematch. "It would have been a pretty fun match-up. They owed us one after the comeback (Hornet win earlier this year). But we'll be rooting for them, wishing our CVC teams the best to keep going."

Matawan's Kirsta Conzo scored a first-half goal on which Tessein felt might have been an offside play, but said "Hey, you're gonna have wrong calls about every 10 minutes in a soccer game. I think in the end, the better team won the game."

"We played well, I thought," Tessein continued. "We played with a lot of heart, the Matawan team created a lot of opportunities but Erin Septer (10 saves) played really well in goal and frustrated their attack and really did control most of their shots."

"We were in it from minute one to 80 and we had ourselves in a position to win. We were playing well enough to put one in and tie it up."

Tessein felt it was a total team effort, saying that "everyone who touched the field played well."

"Loran Wyrrough was all over the field," he said. "I think Matawan had a pretty good scouting report on us, they were concerned about Sammi Barlow but Sam managed to touch ball quite a bit. She played dangerous balls to the corners, stuff that had Matawan worried."

"(Sweeper) Danielle Schneck played outstanding, and I think because of that the whole defense played well. It was the first time I really heard them communicating back there. It was disappointing we couldn't get that goal to tie it."

Matawan improved to 10-7-1 while Hamilton finished an improved season at 5-12-1.



Despite extra attention from Matawan, Sammi Barlow still had a strong game in the Hornets 1-0 loss today (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).