

SEVEN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Written by Jim Ecker
Saturday, 09 June 2012 20:17 -

MUSCATINE - All Doug Graham wanted for his 50th birthday Saturday was a record-setting victory for the Xavier girls soccer team.

Happy birthday, Coach.

The Saints became the first team in the 86-year history of girls athletics in Iowa to win seven straight titles in any sport when they clipped North Scott, 3-1, in the finals of the Class 2A state tournament on a warm, sunny day at the Muscatine Soccer Complex.

Kayla Armstrong scored two goals and Annie Dale collected the other as the Saints reached seventh heaven with their historic triumph.

The Saints sang a chorus of "Happy Birthday" to their London-born coach and later doused him with a bucket of ice water as part of their victory celebration.

Graham emigrated to the United States 30 years ago and owns The Londoner, a British pub and restaurant, on Center Point Road NE, but he said his first love is coaching the Xavier girls.

"There will be a little party tonight," announced Graham, who hugged and kissed as many of his players as he could find. "There will be a little party to celebrate the birthday and the win. You can't get better than that."

Dale broke a scoreless battle with a left-footed goal with 5:07 left in the first half to relieve the stress and pressure on her club. Armstrong, named the captain of the all-tournament team, made it 2-0 with 16:29 left in the game, but No. 14 North Scott got a goal two minutes later from Chloe Gottschalk and the fight was on again.

Armstrong ended the suspense with a goal with exactly one minute left in the 80-minute contest.

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The celebration began a minute later with a handsome trophy, a state championship flag and lots of happy pictures.

"I'm speechless, for once in my life," declared Armstrong, a soccer natural who sways to music before games. "I'm just so happy we could come through and wrap it up at the end and just give it our all one last time."

Armstrong was joined on the all-tournament team by Dale, goal keeper Sarah Chicchelly and defender supreme Mary Levett. The Saints won Class 1A titles in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 and have captured Class 2A crowns the past two years in what is now a three-class system with 1A, 2A and 3A for the biggest schools.

"They're a tough program," said North Scott Coach Dion Ayers. "They're a program that probably could have a chance every year of winning 3A. We knew we had our hands full."

Indeed, the Saints defeated the Class 3A champs this year with a 3-2 victory over Kennedy during the regular season. The Cougars won the 3A title Saturday with a 2-1 verdict over Ankeny.

Dale led the bucket brigade that dumped the ice water on Graham. That elicited another round of cheers from the Saints.

"Right now I'm just so happy that the game is over and that we won," said Levett. "I haven't even had a chance to think about the significance of what just happened. But I'm sure when I do start thinking about it a little more it will just blow my mind. I think this is crazy that we just broke the record."

Cedar Falls won six straight girls swimming titles (1993-98), Bettendorf won six straight tennis titles (1995-2000) and Dubuque Wahlert won six straight volleyball titles (2000-2005), but no team had won seven straight until these Saints came along.

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"It's a great accomplishment. It truly is," said Graham. "It's a testimony to the girls. Their work ethic is tremendous."

Dale hugged her teammates like she didn't want to let go.

"All I can think about is, I'm done now. I have no more Xavier soccer left," she said. "I'm so proud of our team right now."

Dale played with a sore right quad muscle that required treatment during halftime, but she refused to leave the game. "It's numb," she said. "I'm sore, but it was worth it. It was so worth it."

The Saints ended the season with an 18-2 record. North Scott finished 12-10.