

J-Hawks top Wahawks on goal by Owen

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jenna Owen did not start Wednesday's soccer game for Jefferson High School, but she finished it in style.

Owen scored with 7 minutes, 42 seconds left in regulation to snap an 0-0 tie and give the J-Hawks a 1-0 victory over Waterloo West in the regional semifinals at Kingston Stadium.

Jefferson will face Kennedy in the regional finals Monday at 5 p.m. for a berth in the Class 3A state tournament.

Owen normally starts for the J-Hawks (8-10), but she did not crack the opening lineup Wednesday. Coach Ash Brannan used her as a substitute, and she had just re-entered the game as a midfielder when the crucial play occurred.

Katie Dierks had a throw-in for Jefferson from the far side, and the ball came to Owen in front of the goal.

"I had just come in like two seconds before that," Owen said. "I took a shot. I was kind of shocked it went in, actually. I tried to go over her, because there were a bunch of people in front of me."

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Owen lofted the ball over Waterloo West goal-keeper Alex Kastli and gently into the net, ending a scoreless battle. Jefferson dominated the game, but missed several opportunities and needed 72 minutes and 18 seconds to finally score.

"Frustrating," Brannan remarked. "I really wasn't nervous until about 10 minutes left."

He was having a case of deja vu from an earlier game against Waterloo West and didn't like what he saw. The J-Hawks out-shot Waterloo West in a regular-season game, 23-2, but lost 1-0.

"It was the same type of game," he said. "I just didn't want one little slip-up to happen. I honestly thought we'd win 4 or 5 to zero, but it's one of those things."

Brannan took Jefferson to the state tournament in 2006 and 2009, but both times the J-Hawks won regional titles on the road. This time, they'll play for the regional title in Cedar Rapids when they face Kennedy Monday evening at Kingston.

"It would be wonderful to be able to go to state and celebrate in our home town," he said. "We know the challenge is big, but I think we're up for it. At least we have the opportunity."

Kennedy reached the regional finals with a 10-0 victory over Waterloo East Wednesday night.

"We know they're a tough team and they're probably better than us," said Owen, a senior. "But we beat them the last two years, because we've had a tough defense and they haven't been able to make it through and we get that goal."