

Cougars nip Hempstead for trip to state

Written by Guy Martino

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After 60 minutes of its soccer game Monday night, the Kennedy girls were living 10 feet above the net. Nearly 10 Cougar shots sailed past Dubuque Hempstead's goal, and the two teams were locked in a scoreless stalemate in the Class 3A regional finals at Kingston Stadium.

But at the 22:53 mark in the second half, Kennedy's Emily Feltes was fouled inside the box. The Cougars wouldn't have to worry about an airborne blunder on the penalty kick. Feltes nailed the shot to the left past Hempstead's keeper and made sure it was low.

The penalty kick proved to be the difference as the Cougars defeated Hempstead, 1-0, to reach the Class 3A state tournament.

No. 7 Kennedy (14-4) will face No. 3 Iowa City West (17-2) in the quarterfinals of the state tournament Thursday at 5 p.m. at the Muscatine Soccer Complex.

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Kennedy was able to move on thanks to a stiff defensive effort against Hempstead, limiting the Mustangs to eight shots on goal. Cougar goalkeeper Allie Hutcheson, who had a solid night defending goal, saved the shots that Hempstead did manage to sneak through.

With less than two minutes left in the first half, Hempstead had three golden scoring opportunities. Hutcheson spoiled them all. She made three key saves in the span of a minute and kept the Mustangs off the board.



Kennedy also won despite losing its most explosive offensive weapon early in the second half. At around the 30-minute mark, forward Hannah Palomo tumbled to the turf, clutching her leg. She had to be helped off the field and did not return.

Without one of their leading scorers, Kennedy had to compensate.

“One of the things that Hannah brought over the last month or so was a lot of energy and intensity from that forward area,” said Kennedy Coach Andrew McKnight. “She also does a lot of defending that people don’t notice sometimes, so when she is not in there we have to make sure someone brings the same energy.

“But I don’t have too many concerns, because we have several players that are able to do that.”

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Kennedy was able to shrug off the injury, and eight minutes later Feltes was running for a ball deep inside Mustang territory and was fouled from behind. The game-deciding penalty kick followed.

“I was scratching my head myself,” said McKnight. “It was something like the player coming from behind got more of our player than the ball, but we will take it.”

The Cougar defense held strong to secure the victory, even though Hempstead was in desperation mode for the last 20 minutes of the game.

“One of our goals obviously was to advance to state, and we have done that,” said McKnight. “I am fortunate to be [working](#) with such a great group of girls. We deserve to be going to state and I am looking forward to the upcoming games.”