

No.1 Kennedy tips Prairie in rugged MVC

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Mississippi Valley Conference boys soccer this season seems to come down to the survival of the fittest in each and every game.

With the MVC boasting six of the top seven rated teams in this week's Class 3A poll, there are few easy matches.

Pity the sixth-ranked Prairie Hawks, for instance.

They started the year with eight straight wins and climbed to the No.1 ranking. They've since lost four out of five, but their last six games have been to ranked foes.

The Hawks dropped yet another nail-biter Monday night at home, this time a hard-fought 1-0 loss to top-rated Kennedy (10-0, 7-0).

Prairie Coach Curt Lewis, who was disgruntled after a 2-1 defeat at Linn-Mar last week, was much more upbeat following the latest narrow loss.

"We played with a lot better effort tonight," he said. "The effort was 100 percent better than it was against Linn-Mar.

"If we play like that, we're always going to have a chance. We'll hold our own.

"None of our games have been lopsided. We had a good win against Wahlert and good practices. But then we face No.1 Kennedy.

"But that's our conference. Every game is tough."

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Kennedy co-coach Steve Robertson is well aware. His undefeated squad travels to Iowa City Friday to face No.3 West (7-1).

The highly touted Trojans' sole blemish was a 1-0 season opening loss to fifth-ranked Cedar Rapids Washington.

"In this conference, there are so many good teams that one little mistake can cost you the game," said Robertson.

On Monday night, it was Prairie that made the fatal error.

The Cougars were the more aggressive bunch to start the game, for the most part possessing the ball on their end of the field.

"We were quick and really moving the ball," Robertson said.

With strong defensive play close to the net, however, the Hawks kept holding off the attacks.

At the 15:15 mark in the first half, though, Kennedy midfielder Nick Waterhouse had an open look from 10 yards out on the left side and drilled it home.

Another goal just before halftime was thwarted when a Prairie defender barely got a toe on a header by Kennedy's Mitch Bobbin.

"We missed a couple of close ones," Robertson said. "But, then so they did they."

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Lewis said his team knuckled down after a shaky start.

“We seemed to wake up after they scored on us,” he said. “We loosened up, and we made adjustments at halftime.

“We had some chances to equalize it.”

His Hawks were the dominant team to open the second half.

“They came out energized,” said Robertson, “and we kind of stood on the ball. I don’t know if we tired or got a little complacent.”

After withstanding a flurry of Prairie drives, the Cougars settled in. For the most part, the second half was a back-and-forth struggle in the middle third of the field.

Two straight Prairie corner kicks at around the 10-minute mark sailed high. And three long two-handed throw-ins by Prairie’s strong-armed Seth Rinderknecht put the ball in front of the net, but the Hawks failed to connect on any of the passes.

“We knew they’d come back strong,” Robertson said. “The second half was an even game. But in this conference, most games are like that.”