

No. 16 Coe women ousted by Loras

Written by Jim Ecker

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Coe senior Sarah Fathallah left Clark Field for the final time Wednesday evening with a heavy heart and a lump the size of a walnut near her right eye.

Fathallah was hurt with about 14 1/2 minutes left in the second half and never returned to action as the 16th-ranked Kohawks lost to Loras College, 1-1 in a PK Shootout, in the semifinals of the Iowa Conference tournament on the Coe campus.

The Kohawks struggled on offense much of the day and it didn't help when Fathallah, one of their leading scorers, was hit in the head by an opponent's elbow and knocked dizzy. But Fathallah, a former Linn-Mar star, was more bothered by the loss than she was by her nasty-looking injury.

Fathallah was one of the cornerstones as the Kohawks rose from relative obscurity to national prominence this year, and suddenly the season and her career were over after Loras nipped them 3-2 in the Shootout.

"I'm only heartbroken because I wish I had four more years of this, watching the team build and grow and just learn so much," she said. "It's honestly been one of the greatest honors I've been a part of."

Wednesday's setback left Coe with a 15-1-3 record and the most victories in school history, but Coach Scott Myers doubts his team will receive an at-large berth to the NCAA national tournament. The winner of the Iowa Conference tournament will receive an automatic spot in the national tourney and Loras will be aiming for that Saturday.

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It was an especially painful week for Fathallah, who suffered a head injury in practice Monday and barely passed a concussion test Tuesday morning in order to play Wednesday. Myers and the Coe training staff were not willing to let Fathallah return to action Wednesday after she suffered her second head injury in three days.

"They weren't going to try and push it," she said.

Incredibly, Fathallah was willing to be Coe's sixth shooter in the PK Shootout if it had gone that far, but the Shootout ended after five tries for both teams.

The Kohawks beat Loras, 3-1, during the regular season and were a slight favorite Wednesday as the No. 2 seed in the tournament, but the Duhawks have a fine team and will carry an 11-5-3 record into the conference finals.

Myers called his players together after the disappointing loss and reminded them of everything they accomplished this year. The Kohawks won three games in 2013 in his first year as head coach, tripled that number to nine wins in 2014 and made a national name for themselves in 2015 before falling short in the league tournament.

"What I told them is really simple," said Myers, who is also the girls soccer coach at Kennedy High School. "Don't be sad because it happened, but be happy because you were part of it. We'll never repeat anything like this. I'm extremely proud of where they're at.

"I can't complain," he said. "We're 16th-ranked in the country and first in the region. We put kids in the right spots to do things and I can't be any prouder of them."

The first half Wednesday ended in a scoreless tie in sunshine and blue skies, but grey clouds rolled in for the second half and the wind whipped a little harder as the temperature dipped. Madie Avery gave Loras a 1-0 lead in the 61st minute, but

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Ashlyn Moos countered in the 73rd minute for Coe with an assist from Fathallah.

It was still 1-1 after 90 minutes of regulation and still tied after a pair of 10-minute overtimes. That sent the dramatic match into a PK Shootout.

Loras went first in the Shootout and missed, then Kennedy grad Jordan Holmes connected into the upper-left corner of the goal to give Coe a 1-0 lead. Loras made its second shot and Coe missed, making it 1-1.

Loras scored for a 2-1 lead and Coe missed, but then Loras missed and Allison Stubbs scored for Coe to make it 2-2 after four shooters. That's when it turned sour for the Kohawks.

Kat Hermanas scored for Loras, but Jocey Gilbert missed for Coe and that was that.

"I just can't believe it's over," said Holmes. "We were doing so well. I mean, one conference loss on the season coming into this, 16th in the nation, No. 1 in the region. It's just baffling.

"We've been working on PKs all week. It's second nature, and then all of a sudden ..."

All of a sudden it's over. Fathallah, an econ major who plans to attend law school, was glad she came along for the ride and praised Myers for his work with the program.

"He just lit a fire under everyone and recruited and did an incredible job of motivating us and making us believe in ourselves," she said.