

Cougars earn chance to defend title

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Defending Class 3A state soccer champion Kennedy eked out a 1-0 win over Cedar Falls Monday in a regional final at Kingston Stadium, but it was far from easy.

Six minutes into the match, the fourth-ranked Cougar girls were hurting.

The surging Tigers had just missed scoring first when Kennedy goalie Olivia Weigel deflected a hard shot off her fingertips.

Seconds later, Kennedy star midfielder Morgan Petsche was crumpled on the ground with what she first feared was a broken right ankle but apparently is only a severe sprain. Still, it kept her on the bench the rest of the game.

Already on the bench was junior Carly Langhurst, an all-tournament player on the title-winning team and the one who scored the only goal in last year's huge 1-0 upset of unbeaten Linn-Mar to get into the state tourney.

Langhurst tore her ACL in a club soccer game last fall and has missed the whole season. She has served as team manager and, according to Coach Scott

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Myers, its inspirational leader.

For a return trip to this week's state tournament in Des Moines, Kennedy had to do it without two of its best players against a hungry Tiger team eager to avenge a 3-0 loss last month.

"Morgan was screaming and flailing on the field," Myers said. "Obviously, that changed the flow of the game. She's such a dynamic player that she has huge presence out there.

"But we preach team-first, not individuals. The other kids had to step up.



"They just put the ball at their feet and used their talents. They didn't stop, and we finally found a way a win."

The lone goal, scored three minutes after a scoreless first half, came on a typical Cougar team play with senior Alyssa Drewelow feeding junior speed demon Sydney Hayden.

"I saw Alyssa going down the left side," Hayden explained. "I knew she'd be looking for me and she hit a great crossing shot to me.

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"I was right in front of the goal, and all I had to do was knock right down the middle."

From then, it was a matter of keeping Cedar Falls off the scoreboard.

"We had a ton of chances in the second half," said Kennedy junior Linden Runels, who roamed the midfield tirelessly the whole match. "We were just inches from the line.

"With our depth, we used a lot of subs and I think we had more fresh legs."

As his custom, Myers used all 20 players on the roster (with the exception of reserve goalie Brittney Bell).

"I believe in playing everybody," he said. "If they're on the team, why not play 'em. And it definitely helps us."

From the bench, Langhurst tended to Petsche's sore ankle and cheered on her teammates.

"It's hard to just sit and watch," she said. "But I was happy with how we picked things up in the second half.

"Once we found out Morgan was going to be okay, everybody played better."

All for one, and one for all.

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“And we’re going to take all this energy on the bus all the way to Des Moines,” said Runels.

The state tournament begins Thursday at Cownie Park. Kennedy has a 16-3 record. Cedar Falls finished 11-8.

Kennedy (16-3) will face Johnston (13-6) in the first round of the state tournament Thursday at 5:15 p.m.