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PREP SPORTS SCORES & STATS

HOME

12

00:03

VISITOR

03

Prep Sports Home

Verdell Jones

Announcement

Baseball

Softball

Girls' Soccer

Football

Volleyball

Boys' Soccer

Girls' Basketball

Boys' Basketball

Schedules

Forums

Gallery

Preps Podcast

Video

Feedback

Report a Problem

Chargers' win worth the wait

By: Tony Bleill

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MAHOMET - With the clock ticking under 2 minutes and his Centennial girls' soccer team trailing Mahomet-Seymour 1-0 in Friday's Class 2A regional final, coach Hsiung Marler might have been regretting his halftime speech.

"At halftime - people always think I'm crazy because of the things I say at halftime - but I said we've got them right where we want them," Marler said, despite that 1-0 deficit.

"Because we're going to score the next goal."

He didn't realize how long he'd have to wait.

Freshman Tessa Schleyhahn's header with 1:07 left in regulation tied it, and the Chargers scored the game-winner early in the third overtime for a remarkable 2-1 victory against the Bulldogs.

"I think we knew it was going to happen, it was just a matter of when," Marler said.

That confidence must have flowed into his team. Sophomore Nora Al-Qadi scored off a nifty feed from Mary Vannice 12 seconds into the third OT for the decisive goal.

"When Tessa made that goal, we were like, 'We've got this. This is our game,' " Al-Qadi said. "This is a sign that we've got this."

The comeback marked an unlikely title for the Chargers (8-5-4), seeded sixth in their half of the Normal Community Sectional complex. Centennial will face Normal U-High at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday in the sectional semifinal.

It didn't start so well for the Chargers. Mahomet-Seymour's Melissa Sibley scored in the 18th minute for the 1-0 lead, and it appeared the goal would stand up.

"Did they earn a win? Yeah, they earned a win," M-S (9-7) coach Neil Anderson said. "But I thought it was our game to lose in some ways. They definitely surged, and they've got some great players."

Centennial ramped up the pressure late in the second half, removing a defender to aid the attack. Schleyhahn's header off of Vannice's corner kick was the culmination.

"I actually thought I was going to faint," Schleyhahn said, recalling the frantic celebratory moments after her goal. "My mouth was wide open."

The Chargers have endured a rough month of injuries, including a knee injury to standout midfielder Paige Whippo, who played nearly the entire match Friday. She hadn't played more than 20 minutes in a game since injuring the knee last month. But her grit was typical for



the Chargers.

"We have 20 players, and 13 of them right now need ice packs," Marler said. "And they needed ice packs the game before, too. We had so many people playing through injuries, just playing on sheer guts sometimes."

Urbana 2, MacArthur 1

Kate Russell scored a goal and assisted on Erika Dix's tally as the Tigers captured the regional title at Decatur with a win over MacArthur. Keeper Aubrey Morse made seven saves for Urbana in the victory.

The Tigers (8-10-2) advanced to the Normal Community Sectional and will face the winner of today's Bloomington-Normal West match at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday.

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