

## Warriors will themselves to state

Written by MITCH MAERSCH  
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### With gutsy win over rival CG-Belgium in sectional final, Ozaukee soccer team earns long-awaited trip to final four

The four-year goal of Ozaukee High School seniors Erika Karrels, Katie Bares and Micaela Burns has finally been realized.

The Warriors are going to state in girls' soccer after a nail-biting, air-gasping, 1-0 win over rival Cedar Grove-Belgium in a WIAA Division 3 sectional title game last Saturday at New Holstein.



“It feels awesome. Four years of hard work finally paid off,” said Karrels, a goalkeeper who made nine saves.

The Warriors mobbed each other after the game clock expired and were soon joined by parents, family and friends in hugs and high fives, often through tears of joy. Several players said the team’s camaraderie has been key this season.

“It’s indescribable,” said junior forward Natalie Clark, who scored the game’s only goal. “It’s the best feeling in the world, and we have the best bond in the world.”

“It’s unreal. I can’t even explain it,” said freshman Emily Janke, who assisted on Clark’s score.

“We all have each other’s backs,” Karrels said. “I’m so proud of everyone.”

Across the field, Cedar Grove-Belgium players hugged each other as well, but with sobs of sorrow. They controlled the ball for most of the game and had numerous scoring opportunities but just couldn’t put a ball into the net.

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Brooke Keller made several deep runs with the ball in the box, and Halie Schieffer, Brooke Koepsell, A.J. Caldwell and Ashli von Heimborg all kept attacking, but to no avail.

“It’s a cruel game,” Rockets coach Elias Garza said. “You can control all you want. In the end, all it takes is one goal.”

The Warriors scored that one in the 34th minute. Janke and a Cedar Grove-Belgium player both fell going after a 50-50 ball, and Janke got up fast enough to cross the ball to Clark, who finished it off.

“I just kind of got a touch on it and it went in. It was a great pass,” Clark said.

“It felt really good to have that lead.”

Ozaukee had one near-miss scoring chance before that and occasionally moved the ball across midfield, but it was the Rockets who looked like they could have led by several goals. Instead, they had to play from behind.

Warriors coach Eric Liebergen said that was somewhat by design. He said his team hoped to get an early goal and “go into a shell.”

The shell was nearly cracked several times, including one shot by the Rockets late in the second half that hit the crossbar.

“It was so nerve-wracking, every cross they had,” said Janke, who sat out part of the game nursing an ankle injury. “Everyone on the bench was gasping.”

“It was getting really crazy. I was getting so nervous,” Karrels said. “I did not want to go into penalty kicks.”

Liebergen said he expected the Rockets’ barrage.

“You do kind of get used to it as a coach,” he said. “Cedar Grove has too many strong legs.”

Liebergen praised Bares for playing hurt and a determined effort by Burns. Health-wise, the Warriors were thin.

“I was really proud of the girls who gutted it out,” he said.

Liebergen could hardly comprehend the Warriors were actually going to state for the first time since 2007.

“It hasn’t sunk in yet,” he said minutes after the game. “I feel like we’ve had one big hurdle over another.”

The Rockets finished another impressive season at 16-6-3 and 0-2-1 against rival Ozaukee.

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“We tried. Unfortunately, we fell short,” Garza said. “It’s a collective team effort. We score them together, and we allow them together.”

The Warriors (19-1-2) will face defending state champion Lakeside Country Lutheran (15-1-1) in a state semifinal game at 9 a.m. Friday at Uihlein Field in Milwaukee.

The winner will play for the state title at 10 a.m. Saturday.

Ozaukee edges Sturgeon Bay in semifinals

It took a shootout, but the host Warriors prevailed in a sectional semifinal battle against Sturgeon Bay on June 6.

After the teams battled to a 1-1 draw through regulation and a pair of 10-minute overtimes, Ozaukee won a tie-breaking shootout, 3-1.

Bares, Lizzie Janke and Burns all converted penalty kicks for the Warriors in the best-of-five sequence. Sturgeon Bay made only one of its first four attempts against Kaylee Klopp.

Sturgeon Bay held a 1-0 lead at halftime after scoring in the 35th minute. However, Ozaukee drew even at 56 minutes on a goal by Emily Janke.

Liebergen was impressed with his team’s resilience in the face of a second-half deficit.

“We didn’t worry about the score. We just kept playing hard. The girls kept going,” he said.

“That speaks to their character.”

Ozaukee had numerous scoring chances in the first half but couldn’t find the mark. At least four of the Warriors shot deflected off the crossbar in the opening period.

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Image Information: MEMBERS OF THE Ozaukee girls’ soccer team were all smiles as they celebrated their 1-0 win over Cedar Grove-Belgium in a WIAA Division 3 sectional championship game last Saturday. Photo by Mitch Maersch