

Team has winning streak snapped but sharpens its game in tough tournament

If you're going to have a winning streak snapped, it might as well be against top-notch opposition.

The Grafton girls' soccer team was reminded just how tough the state's elite can be when it had to settle for a seventh-place finish at the Laura Moynihan Invitational last weekend.

Coach Don Arnold's squad took a four-game victory streak into the eight-team tournament at Uihlein Soccer Park in Milwaukee but was rudely handled in its first two games.

The Black Hawks fell to Brookfield East, 7-2, in Friday's opening round and to Neenah, 4-1, in Saturday's consolation semifinals before finishing on an up note.

In the seventh-place final, Grafton defeated Nicolet, 5-2, just four days after edging the same foe in a North Shore Conference match.

"We were outplayed in the first two games, but we definitely looked forward to the challenge of facing tough teams," said Arnold, whose team finished the tournament with an 8-3-2 season record.

"It's one of the toughest tournaments in the state, but if we could go back and play in it again this weekend, we would."

Brookfield East and Neenah are both among the state's top Division 1 teams, with East ranked fifth and Neenah receiving honorable mention in last week's coaches poll. Grafton was ranked third in Division 2.

East threatened to turn Friday's game into a rout by scoring three goals in the first 15 minutes. However, the Hawks fought back when Hannah Eichler scored with an assist from Angie Mann in the 22nd minute.

After Gabi Kuester found the net with an assist from Alli Demerath in the 38th minute, Grafton went into halftime trailing by only 3-2.

But the Spartans ended the suspense by dominating the second half. They scored in the 53rd, 54th and 56th minutes and tacked on their final goal with 10 minutes left.

"To our girls' credit, they continued to fight," Arnold said. "It was good to see them battle back in the first half and make a game of it."

East finished with a 14-6 edge in shots.

It was more of the same for the Hawks against Neenah, which jumped ahead, 2-0, with goals in the sixth and eighth minutes.

Grafton trades victories for soccer lessons against elite

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Early in the second half, Eichler cut the deficit in half by scoring off a long shot by Hannah Knauer.

Grafton continued to press its attack, narrowly missing on two attempts, including a shot off the post by Eichler. However, the Rockets countered with goals in the 67th and 69th minutes.

"We did create a number of scoring opportunities, but we weren't able to finish them," Arnold said.

Grafton got back on track early in its final game. Eichler and Emma Fatla scored in the 12th and 13th minutes to put the Hawks up, 2-0, with both goals assisted by Alyssa Arnold.

After Nicolet scored, Carley Pfannerstill made it 3-1 with a goal in the 31st minute, also assisted by Arnold.

In the second half, Pfannerstill set up goals by Tess Safstrom and Eichler.

Grafton resumed North Shore Conference play Tuesday against Whitefish Bay and will participate in the Pewaukee Cup, a four-team tournament, this weekend.

The Hawks will face Kenosha St. Joseph at 4:30 p.m. Friday. Pewaukee and Jefferson will meet in the other semifinal game.

First-round losers will play at 9 a.m. Saturday, followed by the title game at 11 a.m.

On May 11, Grafton will host Milwaukee Lutheran at 7 p.m.

Grafton 3, Nicolet 2

The Hawks overcame a sluggish performance to secure a home win April 27.

Pfannerstill scored off an assist from Eichler early in the first half, but Nicolet tied the game in the 20th minute.

Eichler's unassisted goal in the 49th minute gave Grafton a 2-1 lead, but the Knights again came up with a tying score.

Safstrom delivered the winner with an assist from Kuester in the 78th minute.

The win improved the Hawks' league record to 2-0-1.

Whitefish Bay 9, Port Washington 0

The host Pirates couldn't keep pace with the North Shore Conference's first-place team April 27.

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Bay scored six first-half goals and outshot Port, 23-1. Abby Starker had three goals for the Blue Dukes, who improved to 3-0.

Goalkeeper Alexa Pallo had 12 saves for the Pirates, who fell to 0-3 in NSC play and 0-5 overall.

This week, Port faced Milwaukee Lutheran on Tuesday and will play nonconference road games at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday against Brown Deer and 6:30 p.m. Friday against Whitnall.

On May 11, the Pirates will host Cedarburg at 7 p.m.