

SHS girls' soccer team slays Lady Dragons

Written by George Browning

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In what can only be described as a nailbiter, the Salem Girls soccer team defeated the visiting Silver Creek Dragons in a double penalty kick shootout for a conference win.

Salem, last-year's Mid-Southern Conference co-champion, has struggled this year with only one win and five losses.

Two of those losses have been against conference opponents Scottsburg and North Harrison.

"We were in every single one of those games," said Lady Lion Head Coach Tom Scifres. "They were games we should have won, and the girls know it. We played decent offense and only mediocre defense at every position early in the year, but we have worked on that and improved."

Silver Creek took an early lead off a long shot by Silver Creek midfielder, Haley Turner, that Salem goal keeper, senior Jessica Thomas, tried to stop with her foot.

Scifres described that as a potential low point for a team that has not responded well mentally when things go wrong.

"I am sure Jess wishes she had that back, but things happen in games all the time that you want back," he said. "I am just so proud of our team for not getting down on themselves. They never gave up, and neither did Jess. They communicated—they did all the mental things right throughout the game, and it paid off."

Down 1-0, Salem came out in the second half ready to steal the game.

"This game meant a lot to us, especially our upperclassmen," Scifres said. "Silver Creek is the only opponent we have never beaten. Not only that, but they are probably our closest friends on

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and off the pitch. They got us playing indoor soccer in the winter, and several of our players have become friends through that and as teammates on travel teams in the spring.”

The coaching staff moved junior Brittney Scifres out of the defensive line to a forward spot for the second half.

“Bruce came to me at half [Assistant Coach Bruce Cooke] and suggested the change,” Scifres said. “Sciff was our biggest scorer last year but we had her in the back line this game for transition and ball distribution purposes.”

It paid off when (Brittney) Scifres got the ball outside the right goal mouth and was able to shake a defending opponent with a move for an open look.

“I am so proud of her,” the coach said. “It was a great move and a beautiful shot with her left foot, which isn’t easy, and she absolutely nailed it.”

The shot sailed into the upper right corner of the goal outside the keeper’s reach.

Salem had one other chance to score in regulation.

They had been awarded a corner kick well into the second half.

Brittney Scifres took the kick from the right side and hit a perfect line drive to sophomore forward Mel Cooke on the far side (left) of the goal.

“It was the best executed play all night,” Scifres said. “Britt’s delivery couldn’t have been better, and Mel timed it perfectly. It was one of those plays you see it happening before it happens.” Cooke crashed in for what was clearly going to be a highlight reel score. Then the unthinkable

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happened when a Lady Dragon reached up and deflected the ball off its path so that it popped outside the goal mouth.

As an illegal handball by a non-goalkeeper in the penalty area, Salem was awarded a penalty kick.

The players all lined up outside the area, and Cooke stepped up to take the kick.

“While the referee was booking their player, we were arguing with the referee about whether their player is supposed to be red-carded and ejected from the game,” Scifres said.

During the confusion, Cooke took the shot.

It was a perfect grounder to the right corner, but it didn't count because the referee had not re-started play.

After a few minutes of controversy, Salem prevailed, and the Silver Creek player was ejected. “The delay simply iced Mel; she simply had too much time to think about it,” Scifres noted of the ensuing penalty kick that sailed over the goal.

“It is a shame because her original header was unstoppable by legal means. We would have won the game, and it would have been her shot.”

With no winning goals scored the rest of regulation, IHSAA rules call for a penalty kick shootout to break all conference game ties.

In this procedure a single kicker from one team shoots a resting ball from the 12-yard penalty mark at the goal against only the opposing goalkeeper who tries to stop the shot.

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Each team names five players who stand back outside the penalty area until their turn to shoot. "This is a 24-foot-wide goal, and just about every girl on each team is going to make the shot in practice.

But with the game on the line, players invariably try to kick the ball too hard and they send it over or wide of the goal."

Of the top five, Scifres made special note of sophomore Paige DeNardi.

"This girl was not a starter last year, let alone a star," he said. "She played indoor soccer in the winter and worked on her foot skills in the spring and summer, and the first thing I noticed about her this year was her solid, consistent touch."

Scifres and DeNardi hit their penalty kicks, and only two Lady Dragons were able to hit theirs. Tied after the initial penalty kick round, the game went into a second, sudden death round. One-by-one shots were taken against opposing goal-keepers, with Silver Creek shooting first and a Salem player following.

"The suspense had my stomach in knots," Scifres said. "The entire outcome of a long, hard-fought battle of a soccer game comes down to something as unpredictable as a shootout. It's like breaking a tie in basketball with sudden death free throws!"

It all came to a successful conclusion for Salem when junior Kristin Voyles nailed a goal inside the left post following a miss by the opponents.

"I couldn't have been happier for her," Scifres said. "Kristin has been a solid role player for us but has been hampered by shin splints and hasn't been able to play as hard for as long as she would like."

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With the win, Salem is 1-2 in conference and 2-5 overall.

Salem's next game is against Mid Southern Conference opponent Charlestown, Saturday at home.