

SPORTS

Championship revenge: first-half surge powers Blaine girls soccer on to state

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thing a goalkeeper can do on that is probably give up a rebound, which she did, and it deflected right into Sammi, who is always in that spot. Sammi just knows where to be.”

The two-goal margin provided a shock.

Five minutes later came the stunner.

Handling the ball in space from a deep, sharp angle, Blaine senior defender Emily Baurr whipped a frozen rope on goal.

The Huskies were helpless in defense as the ball tucked into the far corner of the net, giving the Bengals a daunting 3-0 lead just 7:26 before the half.

“I don’t know if I’ve ever seen a kid hit a ball as well as Emily Baurr did,” Zachmann said. “That was an unbelievable shot. From that angle, that pace, upper corner – it’s what legends are made of.”

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-Blaine coach Scott Zachmann on Emily Baurr’s goal

“I was in shock – I didn’t know what to do,” Baurr said. “I was just watching it and thought, ‘I don’t know how that went in.’”

Blaine carried the three-goal advantage into halftime, having capitalized brilliantly on its offensive opportunities, but knowing it needed to clamp down defensively to weather a desperate Andover charge in the second half.

“We actually thought we didn’t play very well the first half,” Zachmann said. “We were going into the wind, we had to battle that for a half. We didn’t hold possession very well. I don’t think we defended one of the 50-50s as well as we should have. So our conversation at halftime was, ‘We have to defend better and we have to possess the ball.’ We did that to start the second half. And then we got out of rhythm.”

A big reason for that came just over nine minutes after the break, as Andover sophomore Olivia Knoepfle won a race to a loose ball in front of the net and chipped it in to put the Huskies on the board and cut the margin to 3-1.

Andover continued to pressure the offensive zone the rest of the match, but the Bengals forced difficult enough angles that the Huskies could not convert.

“We just had to keep our composure and not be too frantic with the ball and get the ball up the field and to the corners,” Baurr said. “Possession pretty much was our game plan.”

“Playoff soccer can be ugly,” Zachmann said. “We had a 3-0, 3-1 lead and were just fighting to maintain that lead and we did. We didn’t play great soccer, but we held on.”

Blaine goalkeeper Ashley Shackelford remained strong in net during the second-half flurry, stifling the Huskies’ scoring opportunities as pressure rose.

“Ashley kept the ball tight to her body all night long,” Zachmann said. “She kept the ball close. Anytime a goalkeeper can keep the ball tight to their body, they’re usually on the good side of things and Ashley was tonight. Great performance by her.”

As the final seconds ticked off, the celebration was on.

“It feels so good,” Baurr said. “Long time coming. It feels so good, it is such a relief. I’m in shock.”

Now, the Bengals are heading to state, with the Class AA quarterfinals taking place Oct. 23-25. Times and locations are to be determined based on seeding.

Blaine will enter with a record of 15-3-1, having just avenged two of its losses by defeating Anoka 1-0 in the section semifinals Oct. 11 on a late goal by Haily Gislason, and now Andover.

“We started this year with this group of seniors that we’ve worked with since they were 12 years old, and a lot of them have been on this team for three, four years,” Zachmann said. “We’ve been in five straight section championships with only winning one. We lost to Andover two years in a row, and their motto coming into the year was, ‘Enough is enough.’ It’s on the back of their T-shirts and they just said, ‘Enough is enough, we’re winning this game.’”

“We knew at the beginning of the year we were probably going to play Andover, either here or at our place, and this was our goal. They worked hard for it and they earned it.”

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Blaine’s Jaida Wiege drills a free kick on net during the second half of the Bengals’ 3-1 Section 7AA final win over Andover Oct. 16. Wiege scored the first goal and set up the second as Blaine clinched a trip to state.

Photos by Patrick Slack



Blaine’s Sammi Proulx (5) handles the ball along the sideline. Proulx scored what proved to be the game-winning goal late in the first half, giving the Bengals a 2-0 lead.



Blaine’s Emily Baurr stunned even herself with a masterful strike that gave the Bengals a 3-0 lead with only seven and a half minutes left in the first half.