

SPORTS



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Minnewaska routs Osakis **Page B2**



Micah Friez / Echo Press

The Blizzard celebrate Caleb Strong's game-winning shootout goal that clinched a 5-4 win over New Ulm at the Runestone Community Center on Saturday.

STRONG SHOWING

Blizzard win shootout in home opener

By Micah Friez
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The Alexandria Blizzard gave its fans a scare on Saturday night, but Alex native Caleb Strong sent the Blizzard faithful home happy when he buried the game-winning shootout goal against New Ulm in the home opener at the Runestone Community Center.

"It's always nice to win your first home game. The place was packed," Alexandria assistant coach Jon Crouse said. "I sent a little kid out to win the game for us, and he did. Hopefully there were some people here tonight that had never been here before and are like, 'This is pretty fun. This is pretty cool.' It's nice, with this big of a crowd, to get a win."

Alexandria recovered when its 3-0 lead collapsed into a 4-3 deficit, and then they held off a Steel power play during the 3-on-



Micah Friez / Echo Press

Caleb Strong readies to fire the game-winning shot in the Blizzard's 5-4 shootout win over New Ulm at the Runestone Community Center on Saturday.

3 overtime before Strong netted the only goal of the shootout for a 5-4 win.

"It was pretty good," Strong, a junior on the Alexandria Area High School team, said. "Team effort,

though. Couldn't do it without Benny (goalie Benjamin Vutci). He was a stone wall back there."

BLIZZARD: Page B3

Storm rally strips Cards of an upset

By Micah Friez
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The fate of Friday night's football game rested in the hands of the Alexandria defense.

Ahead 21-14 with seven seconds remaining, the Cardinals needed one final stop from the 11-yard line to upset Sauk Rapids-Rice at AAHS.

Instead, Christian Rodriguez laid out for a full-extension, toe-tapping touchdown in the back of the end zone as the clock ran down to triple zeroes. The Storm then went for the 2-point conversion, and JD Bates took a pitch and dashed inside the pylon on the option, vaulting SRR to a 22-21 comeback win with not a second to spare.

"That's not easy. For the kids, too... they know, as well. It's tough," Alexandria head coach Mike Empting said. "In the end, the kid made a great catch in the back of the end zone. The option, that's not something they (normally) do. ... They made a good play, too."

The game appeared decided when Alexandria (2-5) recovered a

fumble on a strip sack inside two minutes, just after Sauk Rapids-Rice (6-1) called its final timeout. But the Cardinals returned the fumble instead, and 30 yards later, coughed it up and back to the Storm. Still, Empting felt good about his defense, which had played solid most all night.

"Going into the last drive, I felt good. We had a situation where we could have ended it, with that turnover-turnover. But even with that, 1:13 to go, they've got to go 60-some yards to get to the end zone."

Instead, the late score spoiled Alexandria's own comeback efforts.

The Storm grabbed the early momentum when Rodriguez caught a first-quarter pass near the line of scrimmage, broke a few tackles and then sprinted 34 yards down the sideline for the night's opening touchdown.

Nolan Morical returned the ensuing kickoff to the SRR 34-yard line, but Rodriguez kept the score at 7-0 after one with an interception deep in his own territory.

FOOTBALL: Page B3



Micah Friez / Echo Press

Alexandria freshman Kristen Hoskins (86) stiff-arms Sauk Rapids-Rice's Tanner Andvik after a catch in the first half of Friday's 22-21 loss at AAHS.

Cards lose PK heartbreaker in playoff opener



Micah Friez / Echo Press

Alexandria senior Kaye Paschka (2) heads a pass down the field during Thursday's loss to Fergus Falls in the Section 8A Tournament at AAHS.

By Micah Friez
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On a night when ice covered parts of the pitch, the Alexandria girls soccer team got burned by Fergus Falls.

The fourth-seeded Cardinals played like the better team for much of the night at AAHS on Thursday, but the fifth-seeded Otters held onto a 1-1 tie through 80 minutes of regulation and 20 minutes of overtime in the Section 8A Tournament opener.

Penalty kicks then decided the victor, where it was ultimately Fergus Falls stealing the 2-1 win behind a 3-1 advantage in the shootout.

"(Soccer) in particular — more than other sports — sometimes it's not fair," Alexandria head coach Tom Roos said. "Our girls played in a way that they can really be proud of themselves. That being said, it doesn't feel very good right now."

Alexandria (7-9-1) blitzed Otter keeper Svea Smedstad for the final 10 minutes of regulation and nearly all of the two 10-minute overtime periods. But time and time again, Smedstad stonewalled every quality look the Cards created.

"I just don't really think it was our night for scoring," senior forward Kaye Paschka

said. "It's a bad night not being able to score, obviously. We definitely had a lot more opportunities than usual tonight. Unfortunately, we just couldn't make any of them go in for some reason."

The one look they did convert, though, was on a penalty kick for Hailey Eggebraaten after Sidney Drew was taken down from behind in the box. The 31st-minute score served as the equalizer following a Sophie Rausch goal that put the Otters (7-8-2) ahead 1-0 in the 26th minute.

The second half went scoreless, though not for lack of effort.

"It's just so cool, because playoff season is when everyone truly gives 100 percent," Paschka said. "You're really seeing everybody's full effort out there. At this time of the year, everybody is just so bonded together that you care that much more. You want to work super hard for your team."

That effort sparked constant opportunities to net the go-ahead goal, but Alexandria just couldn't get a key bounce to go its way.

"We had chances. We were rocking it down there, we were throwing everything at them," said Roos. "And it wasn't

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