

Tigers Have Season Worth Celebrating

By Jon Gerardi

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So far, you definitely can argue that it's been a season worth celebrating for the Southern Columbia girls soccer team.

The Tigers first avenged losses from last year by defeating Central Columbia, Warrior Run and Loyalsock this year, the only teams to beat them the past two seasons.

A short while later, they won the Heartland Athletic Conference-Division II league title. Add to that list a District 4 Class A championship. The Tigers ended a long, 11-year drought on Saturday with a convincing 4-1 win over Millville to claim the school's first District 4 girls soccer title since 2002.

For the 11 seniors on the Tigers roster, winning that championship Saturday evening meant a lot for a group of girls that often came so close, yet a little empty handed.

"I just think it's such an accomplishment because we've worked so hard for our whole four years and we've always got there (districts) and then didn't get there in the end, but I think for our senior year, this is a nice way to end this way," senior forward Mackenzie Clark said after Saturday's win.

"Winning league and district titles, it's pretty amazing and we all feel pretty accomplished," senior Bailey Bzdak, who scored a hat trick in the district final, added Saturday. "And being our senior year, majority of our starters are seniors, (so) it's really exciting for all of us to do this our senior year. Our last time, our last chance, and we're really following through with the opportunities we get."

And that next opportunity is the PIAA Class A state tournament, which begins today against District 11 champion Schuylkill Haven. The Tigers (19-1-1) are looking to get their first win in the state tournament since 2010.

The Hurricanes (20-2) blanked Pine Grove, 4-0, in the district final on Thursday. Schuylkill Haven has won two of the past three District 11 championships and appeared in its third straight final.

Much like the Tigers, Schuylkill Haven returned a plethora of starters from 2012 and so far have been scoring at will on opponents. Through 22 games, the Hurricanes have found the back of the net 121 times and have allowed just 11 goals all season while recording 13 shutouts.

The Tigers will have a tough test against Schuylkill Haven junior Rileigh Evitts (43 goals) and senior Kelsey Sisko (42).

However Southern Columbia's defense has been stingy all season: allowing 12 goals and recording a second-best 12 shutouts in the Valley.

Despite the solid opponent Southern Columbia faces, winning districts was a nice boost that the Tigers certainly hope can get them further into the PIAA state tournament.

"It's definitely good because it does give us a lot of momentum just coming off that high of a win in districts. The momentum's definitely going to help," Bzdak said. "Just winning a league title helped us coming into districts. We won't know the kind of teams we'll see, but I kind of think that's sometimes better. ... It's exciting to win (districts) and it will definitely help with states and get us through there."

Bzdak leads Southern with a team-high 22 goals while Clark is right behind her with 19.

Bzdak, Clark and Haley Levan also are the top three assists leaders in the area.

The Tigers weren't the only Valley team to end a long district title drought.

On Saturday, the Danville boys snapped a 10-year skid where they hadn't hoisted a District 4 Class AA championship when the Ironmen defeated Warrior Run, 2-1, thanks to a Gage Reber goal in overtime.

"We have been knocking on the door the last two years with winning the league only to lose to Lewisburg in the semifinals. I knew it was only a matter of time before we would get it done, but it was well overdue," Danville coach Brian Dressler said.

Danville had an impressive District 4 playoff-run, topping two extremely solid teams in back-to-back games; first topping a then-defeated Lewisburg team, 2-1, before defeating the Defenders.

Facing those type of tough opponents in districts can only benefit Danville (15-5) today in the PIAA Class AA state tournament as the Ironmen look to keep winning against Tunkhannock (16-3) at Lake Lehman High School at 7 p.m. But the Ironmen know they have to look forward and not focus on what they've done so far this year.

You have basically put your entire season in the past and focus on the next game," Dressler said. "You can't think of what you have done, but rather what you want to do and the goal of winning the next game."

Tunkhannock claimed the District 2 Class AA crown with a 4-3 win over Berwick. For Tunkhannock coach Mark Stroney, it's his 11th overall District 2 crown (six with Abington Heights, four with Lake Lehman).

Reber has been just one of Danville's offensive threats this year. Eric Dempsey leads the team with 19 goals