

V I C T O R Y !

SLUH claims third state soccer title, first since '90

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Reporter

A state title couldn't have been less likely for a team that had to face the number one team in the St. Louis metro area in their district final game; for a team that had to travel two hours just to play in their sectional and quarterfinal games; for a team that had to play an undefeated team in the semifinals; for a team that was playing the two-time defending state champion in the finals; and for a team that hadn't won the most coveted prize in its sport, the state championship, in 13 years. In short, the state title couldn't have been less likely for the St. Louis U. High Soccer Bills.

It had been 30 years since St. Louis U. High head coach Charlie Martel won a state championship when he was a player for SLUH, and it had been 20 years since assistant coach Charlie Clark won while playing for CBC. But all those things changed Saturday, and so did the record books of SLUH and of the state of Missouri, when the Jr. Bills became state champions once again with a 3-0 victory over the Chaminade Red Devils, securing the Jr. Bills' first state championship since 1990 and the third in the storied tradition of St. Louis U. High soccer.

Although they completely dominated Saturday's game, the Jr. Bills faced adver-

sity on their way to the state final. Having survived their district final, a four-overtime penalty shot thriller against CBC, and their trips to Jefferson City, the team returned home to face the Cape Central Tigers, who were supposed to challenge only slightly the powerhouse Jr. Billikens.

And it seemed as if this prediction would prove true. After several early attempts, David Mueller redirected a John Kornfeld pass to Joe Germanese, who

game's second goal, a goal that seemed to give the Jr. Bills command of the game and a sure ticket to the finals.

"At that point, we were all looking to the finals," said Germanese. "We felt we were in control."

Assistant coach Charlie Clark admitted, "I started worrying about the second game." But after the goal, "(I) started worrying about the second half."

Control in a soccer match can be lost or won with one play and gained or regained with another, and though the Jr. Bills seemed to be in command, it was Cape Central that took the reins later in the second half. On a backfield miscue, the Tigers capitalized and put the ball in off goalie Ben Brockland for the first goal against him this season.

"It was just a mistake," Martel said of Brockland's mishandle. "It's just one of those things that



Mueller slips a shot past the Chaminade keeper to put the Jr. Bills up for good last Saturday.

slammed it home 26 minutes into the game for the team's first goal against the Tigers.

The opportunities for goals just kept on coming for the Jr. Bills, as they flooded the Central goal with shots just before halftime but to no avail. But just minutes out of the halftime huddle, Germanese had another chance. A Mueller pass to Andy Leindecker at the top of the box turned into a cross for the slashing Germanese, who headed the cross into the back of the goal for his and the

happens."

"After that goal I tried not to think about it, but it was impossible," said Brockland, who let in another goal shortly thereafter off a corner kick that tied the game and gave Cape Central momentum for the last 12 minutes of play, despite some attacks on goal by Germanese and Co.

The overtime played much like the game, but it was the Tigers who seemed to

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have the better chances. Central sent a low ball on goal, which left a perfect shot for a rebound after the save. Luckily, though, Brockland was able to save that shot, too, and the ball was sent out of bounds by defender John Reagan.

“Even though they had that opportunity, I never felt out of control,” said Germanese. “Losing never crossed my mind.”

It shouldn't have, because after the save, with the ball

safely downfield, Germanese stepped up for the strike. A pass from Mueller set up his shot; Germanese let the ball run across the box and then shot across the box again, bouncing the ball off the post and in to give him his first career hat-trick and the team its ticket into the finals.

Relief came over the SLUH fans, players, and coaches. Richard Winkler summarized, “It could have been the biggest feeling of triumph or despair we could have experienced.”

“I knew we had to score early or we would be in big trouble,” said Martel. “We were already cramping up.” Added Martel, “(Germanese) got us through to the (next round of) the final four.”

Clark said, “He turned their lights out. He ended their season in one quick step.”

So with luck either on their side or possibly run out, the Jr. Bills marched on to their finals matchup with rival Chaminade, the MCC champion and a team that held higher national and metro rankings than the Jr. Bills.

“We had revenge on our mind,” said Germanese.

Winkler added, “We would not lose to them. There was no question.”

The Jr. Bills would have to prove their muster on the field, though, against the two-time defending state champion Red Devils. The Jr. Bills had had a problem scoring

against highly-rated teams this year. In their combined four matchups against Chaminade and CBC, considered by most the top teams in the state and possibly the country, the Jr. Bills had only managed one goal, despite the fact that they were one of the top-scoring teams in state history.

“I didn't think they could match up with us,” said Clark, adding, “(it was) a fluke they beat us (the first time).”

With this in mind and a no-lose attitude, the Jr. Bills strode onto the field Saturday without much to lose and everything to gain.

The game started out like any other, but it quickly diverged from the normal path of a Jr.

Bill game against a top-ranked opponent. Just about ten minutes in, Mueller deflected a Chaminade attempt to clear the ball, juked around a defender, and put a shot in the lower right corner of the box, beating the Chaminade defense and goalie

side of the field and shot a dart into the left side of the goal, bouncing off the side netting that Martel holds so dear to his heart.

“That was probably the best ball I've struck all year,” said Germanese of his goal. “I hammered it”.

With two goals in hand, SLUH reverted to its old methods to keep on top, making the game a midfield battle to keep Chaminade from scoring.

Clark did not feel anxiety at the prospect of the Red Devils coming back after moving Mueller back into the midfield for a more defensive strategy. “After that,” Clark said, “I knew they wouldn't be able to generate too much.”

Even without Germanese in the game because of a pulled hamstring, the Jr. Bills rolled, and Chaminade had only a few scoring opportunities.

With time winding down and Chaminade desperate to score, sophomore Zach Weiss, the future of Jr. Bills soccer, scored the game's final goal, an empty netter that put the exclamation point on the victory.

“My defense was the best,” said goalie Brockland of the less-challenging state final game. “They were absolutely amazing.”

Said Germanese, an All-American and future collegiate soccer star, “It feels so good to go out on top, to end on a win.”

Said fellow captain Kornfeld of the win, “It feels even better than I expected it to.”

The Jr. Bills ride off into the sunset as champions, with the seniors winning their final game against a team



Germanese en route to the second of three goals against Cape Central Friday night.



The state champions show the camera who is number one.

for the first goal of the game.

This swift strike by Mueller have been potentially the game winner, especially considering the last Chaminade-SLUH matchup, but there were more goals to come for the Jr. Bills. Three minutes later, Germanese took the ball down the right

they hadn't beaten since their freshmen year and the team winning something that the school hasn't seen in a generation. Congratulations to the coaches and players, and the staff, especially managers Chris Daues, Matt Pijut, and Pat Gleason, whose unheralded work certainly contributed to this season's great success.