

Sports

Sullivan's big save gets Althoff a win over West

BY DEAN CRIDDLE
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BELLEVILLE
The Althoff coaching debut of Skip Birdsong proved to be painful, thrilling and happy on Monday at Belleville West High School.

Sophomore goalie Riley Sullivan stopped a penalty kick shot by Belleville West senior Trevor Biver in sudden death as Althoff opened play in the Metro Cup Soccer Tournament with a 1-0 win over the Maroons.

In a game which featured end-to-end action from the outset it was the goalies who stole the show. Making his varsity debut, Belleville West senior Jordan Douglas was magnificent all night. The agile Douglas made at least six saves from point-blank range — including three in the first five minutes — to keep the Crusaders off the scoreboard.

Sullivan also made several outstanding saves throughout 80 minutes of regulation and then 10 minutes of overtime. But Sullivan saved the best when he stopped Biver's shot. Althoff had a 6-5 advantage in penalty kicks.

"I just guessed right," Sullivan said on the game-winning save. "It was a do or die guess. I'm just glad made the right move in the end. It was a game both teams wanted to win. I'm just glad we came out on top."

Tied at 5 after the first round of PK's, Althoff's Mitchell Kidd scored to lead off the second round before Sullivan gave Althoff the emotional win with his stop.

The win put the finishing touch on a rather roller-coaster debut for Birdsong. The Crusaders' coach suffered a broken finger while catching a shot on the Crusaders' sideline, then went through more than 2 1/2 hours of nonstop action as the two city rivals thrilled a large crowd with great opening-round play.

"How do I go through this 20 more times this year," an emotionally drained Birdsong said. "Riley's a kid who came in last year against Collinsville and played well for us. He just did a great job and the goalie from Belleville West (Douglas) did a great job for his team as well. I think I know a little bit about the Southwestern Conference. I'm telling you right now that Belleville West is a fine team and they will win a lot of games."

"I'm just very happy with the way our kids battled tonight. We beat a very good team."

HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER

Waterloo, Gibault play to scoreless tie

BY DAVID WILHELM
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COLUMBIA
Defending Class 2A state champion Waterloo applied consistent second-half pressure Monday, but earned no reward in its rivalry soccer game

against Gibault.

The Bulldogs pinned down the Hawks for extended periods of time and racked up 12 corner kicks. Gibault's defense, particularly senior goalie Trevor Davis, met the challenge and the game ended in a scoreless draw before a large crowd at

Oerter Park in Columbia. It was the season opener for both teams.

"I thought we did dominate, but I tell you what, their goalkeeper had a heck of a game," Waterloo coach Chad Holden said. "He came up with some huge saves. He saved them in there numerous, numerous times. On our corners, he's got some height to him (6-foot-3), some good wingspan. He might have been the player of the game."

The Hawks had a chance to win in dramatic fashion in the closing seconds. After a Bulldog foul, senior midfielder Kyle Rocca hit a blistering free kick from 35 yards

away that forced Waterloo senior goalkeeper Trevor Coplin to make a strong save of his own before time expired.

"We had a chance to put one away, but it didn't work out," said Gibault coach Matt Reeb, who was still satisfied with the tie. "It's a good result against a really good team. They had the better of the play at moments, so I can't be displeased with a 0-0 tie."

"Any time you tie a rival, it doesn't always sit great, but it's better than a loss."

SCACE COMES CLOSE

Gibault senior Dalton Scace was all over the Bulldogs in the opening 10

minutes and had the game's first quality scoring opportunity.

In the sixth minute, Scace split a pair of defenders and was eyeball to eyeball with Coplin in the box. But Scace, who had 22 goals and 10 assists last season, pushed a shot wide right.

"His touch leading up to the shot was bad," Reeb said. "That's what kind of killed him. He didn't have his setup, approach touches he should have had."

"No one seemed to quite have the last finishing touch. They had their chances in the first half; we had a breakaway

SEE SOCCER, 5B

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Althoff coaching staff gains ex-NFL linebacker

Tommy Polley, a former NFL player, said he has knowledge about football and life to give back to Althoff Catholic High School athletes as their assistant football coach.

BY NORM SANDERS
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BELLEVILLE
Former St. Louis Rams linebacker Tommy Polley arrived at Althoff High early Saturday morning in preparation for the Crusaders' football scrimmage game.

Not far removed from a career that saw him earn the 2001 NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year award and return a Brett Favre interception for a touchdown in the playoffs, Polley is back on field again as an Althoff assistant coach.

"These kids ... I'm 10 years out," Polley said with a smile, looking back on an NFL career that saw him play with the St. Louis Rams (2001-04), Baltimore Ravens (2005) and New Orleans Saints (2006) before retiring because of a shoulder injury. "They're on the now, they're on the new guys out here so I'm kinda old news, which is cool. I don't have any problem being that."

"When they do go back and Google me and see 'Coach did make some plays...' I got that the other day. I don't try to use that as a tool to my expertise, I just try to bring what I did on the field. What am I giving you to make you a better player?"

Althoff head coach Ken Turner said the Crusaders players did a little homework once they found out they had a former NFL player on the coaching staff.

"They knew about him (in the NFL) from day one, but it didn't sink in with them," said Turner, whose team finished 13-1 last season and reached the Class 4A state title game. "Now they've been researching and Googling him and seeing him pick off Brett Favre and stuff like that. That takes it to another level with how they feel about him. You couldn't have a better guy

SEE ALTHOFF, 4B



MICHAEL CONROY AP

In this Jan. 20, 2002, file photo, former St. Louis Rams linebacker Tommy Polley returns an interception for a touchdown during their NFC divisional playoff game against the Green Bay Packers in St. Louis, Mo.

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