

MAKING HISTORY



North Allegheny Girls' Soccer Team captures first-ever WPIAL victory.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK



For the first time in school history, the North Allegheny girls' soccer team has captured a WPIAL victory.

In a windy, rain-soaked battle at Highmark Stadium on Halloween, the Tigers defeated top-seeded Norwin 2-0, capturing their first championship. The Section 1-AAAA WPIAL win marked a banner season for the girls' team, which lost only two non-section games the entire year.

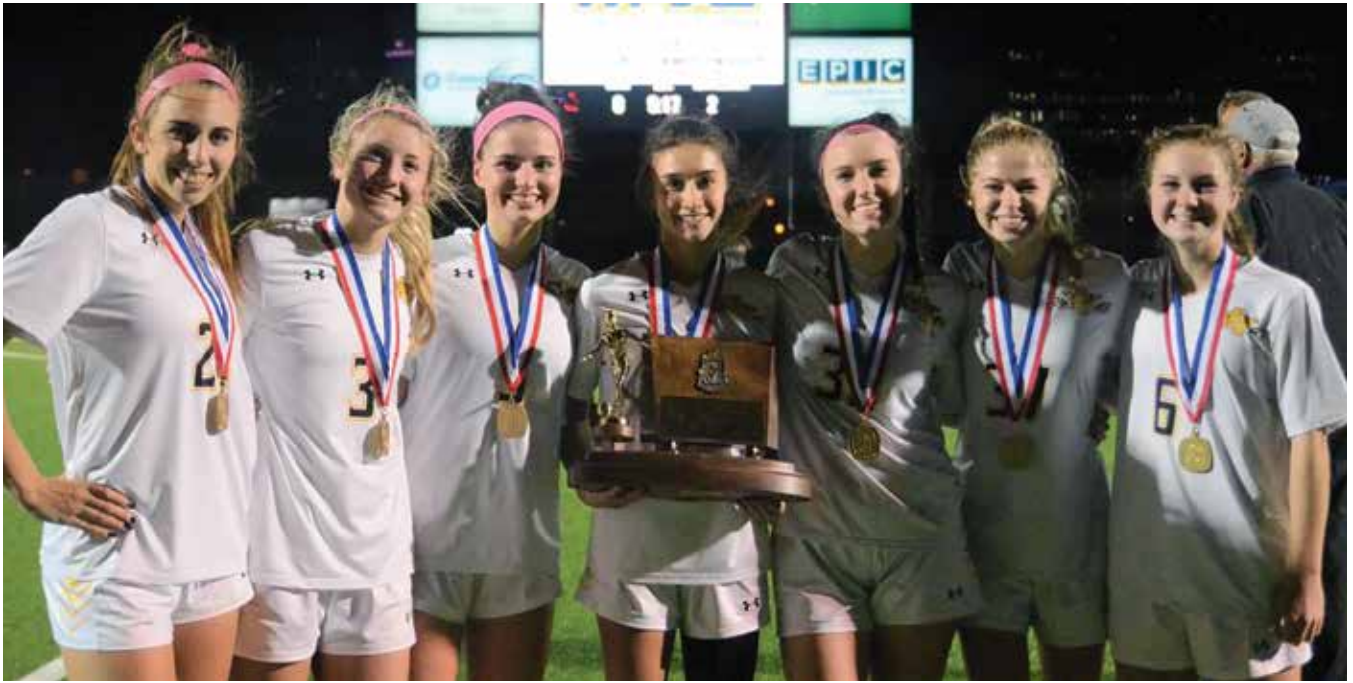
With 33:26 remaining in the second half, senior Ava Ruppensberger passed to senior captain Emma Bundy, who then passed to a wide-open Sarah Schupanksy, who gave the Tigers a 1-0 lead. Then, with only 2:30 left in the game, Bundy passed to Hannah Kirkpatrick in front of the Norwin net. Kirkpatrick scored her fourth goal of the season in the shutout against the Knights.

When he took over the team five years ago, head coach Chuck Kelley says that he was driven by the opportunity to take the girls' team to a championship level.

"Each sports program at this school is competitive, and it prides itself on that history of competition. When you walk into the gym, and see all of the championship banners hanging—you want to be a part of that," says Kelly. "For this program to have fulfilled that aspiration, it's just been fantastic."

Kelley says that the girls' offensive playing style helped to propel them into the finals.

"We don't just play high school soccer," says Kelley, who was recently named Section 1 Coach of the Year. "It's easy to say, but when you see the girls playing the game, it's amazing. Some



teams are just good at defending, but we have a creative group with talented forwards who can score a lot of goals. That gives us flexibility in the way we attack and defend the ball.”

As a whole, the team’s biggest strength is its leadership on and off the field.

“These girls are friends and leaders both on and off the field, both academically and in sports,” says Kelley. “It’s shown in how they lean on and support one another, both on the soccer field and in school, and in how they spend time together. We have a special group of players.”

One of those players, senior center back Natalie Mudd, agrees. Mudd is part of a tough-to-beat defensive line—all of whom were named Wright Automotive Players of the Game following the championship win.

“This was a team success. No one player carried the whole team, but I try to do my job and contribute as my teammates need me to,” Mudd, 17, says. “Between the backline and our keeper, we had nine shutouts this season. Since I play in the backline, I have a great view of the field and can communicate with the rest of the team. Still, this success was the team’s. Everyone did what was necessary for us to continue on and gave everything they had. We won as a team.”

Bundy, 17, agrees. “Everyone on the team was working so hard all season towards the goal of winning WPIALs,” she says. “It was a great feeling when all our hard work paid off.”

The Tigers continued their winning streak into the first round of the PIAA playoffs on Nov. 5, when they defeated Cumberland Valley 1-0. Their championship run ended in the second round, when they lost 3-2 in overtime to Boyertown.

Now, says Kelley, the team is looking forward to regrouping and setting new goals for next year. “After winning a championship, you have something of a championship hangover,” says Kelley with a laugh. “I’m very proud that the girls continued to give their best after that first game [of the PIAA playoffs].”

Mudd says that after a hard-fought season, winning the WPIAL championship was one of the “most incredible feelings in the world.”

“Knowing our hard work paid off was one of the best rewards,” she says. “The fact that we were the first North Allegheny Girls Soccer team to ever win was staggering. We are very proud of that accomplishment. After the final whistle, I was honestly in shock because it felt so surreal, but that soon wore off and turned into extreme excitement and happiness. I definitely cried tears of joy.”

Realizing that her team was making NA history was also a magical moment for Bundy, a four-year varsity starter.

“There has never been a North Allegheny girls soccer team to make it to the finals, so it was really cool to know that we were going to be the first team to do that,” she says. ■

