Sports

Stifling defense defines Central championship

Zero goals given up in postseason run

BY MICHAEL GIVNER JR.
THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE



MICHAEL GIVNER JR./The News-Enterprise

Central Hardin players and coaches celebrate after completing their unscored upon postseason run and undefeated season with the state championship trophy.

What is the key ingredient for a championship team? Maybe it's a superstar offense that can score at will or coaching that can turn beginner players into all-world dynamos.

For Central Hardin girls soccer – the 2026 KHSAA state champions – the answer is stifling defense.

If the other team never scores, you cannot lose. And Central Hardin did not. The Lady Bruins went the entire season with zero losses.

Only four schools found the net against Central Hardin, and their last goal allowed was Sept. 16.

In the final 14 straight games, not a single point was allowed. Only six goals were surrendered during the entire season and zero allowed during the postseason.

This is a recipe for success in a deep playoff run, which resulted in the Lady Bruins first KHSAA soccer championship.

And it gets more historic than that. The Lady Bruins finished the season 25-0-3, becoming the first high school since 2021 in Kentucky to win it all undefeated.

"The girls, seeing them all emotional and crying after the game and how excited they were to (win it all) has been something special," head coach Justin Maddock said.

Senior goalkeeper Hannah Ferguson, who was responsible for the Lady Bruins 0.2 goals allowed per game, finished the season with 22 individual shutouts, three of which came in the playoffs. Whereas the team's semifinal game against Paul Laurence Dunbar was a grudge match at the end to keep the ball out of the net against an onslaught of shot attempts, the defense had a different approach against South Oldham.

"We kept it on their half," Maddock said. "That's a better defensive set up than hunkering down and taking shot or cross after cross. Our girls' energy and passion to press and get forward was nice to see. They were getting forward and had the energy to tackle upfront and that made us go 'you know what, this is the way we're going to see it out'."

Ferguson received KHSAA All-Tournament team honors. She had one save in the championship game, but allowed no balls past her in the 80 minute contest. Individually, she allowed just four goals all season. Ferguson went out with a bang in her last year on the team as she will be graduating, but the impact she left will be felt, especially with new hardware.

"We proved that with the right people and the right coaching that anything can happen," Ferguson said.

South Oldham didn't have a large number of chances. Once they scored, Central Hardin was able to clamp down defensively and really keep the ball away from the net. The Dragons had five shot attempts in the second half, but none were truly threatening a goal. It was the Lady Bruins who really were putting the pressure on offensively, with a near goal that almost made it 2-0.

In the end, when you're crafting your championship team, set the heat to 350 degrees, make sure to balance your seasoning, and make sure you remember the motto "Defenses win championships."



MICHAEL REEVES/Tribune News Service

Kansas' Trey Kaufman-Renn (9) and Tyran Stokes (4) celebrate a first-half basket Tuesday in the win over Kentucky in the State Farm Champions Classic.

Spurned to burned

Tyran Stokes powers Kansas past Kentucky

BY BRETT DAWSON
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE



NAM Y. HUH/Associated Press

Kansas guard Taylen Kinney pressures Kentucky guard Alex Wilkins (10) during the second half of Tuesday's game in the State Farm Champions Classic in Chicago.

Mark Pope and his Kentucky basketball program spent considerable time and offered ample money in recruiting Tyran Stokes.

There was never any doubt how much the Wildcats wanted the 6-foot-8 wing, who is originally from Louisville.

Tuesday night at the United Center was a fresh and unkind reminder of what they'd missed.

Stokes boosted No. 15 Kansas — the team he chose over the Wildcats — to an 89-69 win in the Champions Classic, providing the kind of singular talent the 24th-ranked Cats lack and the shot creation Kentucky needs against quality competition.

Stokes finished with 21 points on 8 of 19 shooting. He had 10 rebounds and four assists.

For good measure, Stokes — who'd made 1 of 4 3-pointers combined in KU's first four games — hit 4 of 8 against the Cats.

The prolonged KU/UK recruiting battle made Stokes the story of the night, but he wasn't the only Jayhawk giving Kentucky fits.

Tre White scored 30 points for KU; Trey Kaufman-Renn added 12.

But it wasn't just the balanced offense that gave Kentucky problems.

The Cats shot 46.4% from the floor, but they struggled to find scoring opportunities. Kansas had 10 more field-goal attempts — including a 13-shot advantage in the first half — thanks to strong offensive rebounding and Kentucky turnovers.

UK couldn't get sharpshooter Milan Momcilovic involved. Power forwards Ousmane N'Diaye and Justin McBride combined for six shot attempts and four rebounds. Guard Mason Williams, an early surprise this season, had four points in 17 minutes and was 0 for 3 from the floor.

And though point guard Zoom Diallo had the best game in his young UK career — the Washington transfer had 24 points on 10-of-15 shooting — he didn't have an assist on a night when the Cats had only 13 as a team.

UK battled early foul trouble.

Center Malachi Moreno committed his second foul 3 minutes and 23 seconds into the game. Less than a minute later, forward Ousmane N'Diaye picked up two fouls on the same play – one a technical that counted as a personal – and picked up his third at the 15:40 mark of the first half on a moving screen.

That forced Pope into some unorthodox rotations in his front court.

Franck Kepnang entered the game at the 16:37 mark after Moreno's second foul, and Kentucky

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RUSTY JONES/Associated Press file

Kirk Cousins again will wear the Minnesota Vikings uniform after a deadline-day trade with the Las Vegas Raiders.

Cousins returns to Vikings; Colts keep Taylor

BY ROB MAADDI
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

Kirk Cousins is returning to Minnesota. Keenan Allen is heading to San Francisco. Josh Downs is going to Kansas City.

And Jonathan Taylor is staying in Indianapolis.

The Colts' decision to keep the three-time Pro Bowl running back was the biggest surprise Tuesday when several teams filled needs ahead of the trade deadline.

Buffalo added safety Amani Hooker, Denver got linebacker Daiyan Henley, and Baltimore and Atlanta swapped offensive linemen.

The Vikings (6-2) turned to a familiar quarterback to try to rescue a woeful offense, acquiring Cousins from the Las Vegas Raiders in a move that bolsters their chances in a competitive NFC North that features four teams with winning records.

Carson Wentz's dismal performance in a 23-6 loss to the Bills on Monday night fueled Minnesota's push for a reunion with Cousins, who threw for 4,547 yards and made his fourth Pro Bowl in 2022 while helping the Vikings win 13 games in coach Kevin O'Connell's first season.

After a 6-0 start, the Vikings have lost two in a row. They have the league's stingiest defense, allowing 14.5 points per game.

But they're scoring just 18.3 points per game. Kyler Murray is dealing with a hamstring issue but the offense wasn't productive with him. Wentz came off the bench after Murray was injured and completed 12 of 19 passes for 133 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions in a 39-22 win over Green Bay in Week 1.

Against the Bills, he was 8 of 25 for 81 yards, two interceptions and lost a fumble on an overthrown backward pass. His QB rating was 8.9 for the game.

Neale dies days after fall during race

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYDNEY — Jockey Izzy Neale died on Tuesday two days after her horse fell during a race in Australia, the Racing NSW state thoroughbred authority said.

The 22-year-old Neale suffered injuries Sunday when her horse Marnoo fell and suffered a fatal leg injury in the home straight of a 1,600-meter race at Warren racecourse.

She was unconscious when airlifted to hospital and Racing NSW released a statement Tuesday from her family that she had died.

"Izzy rode horses before she could walk. Her love of horses was a lifelong passion that, more recently, had grown into a love of racing," the statement said of Neale, who rode 88 winners in her career. "Through organ donation, Izzy will give others the chance of life, bringing some comfort to our family amid this devastating loss."