



WPIAL boys soccer championships: Moon, Pine-Richland win titles

KEITH BARNES

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Moon had a pretty good idea how to approach Ambridge when the two met at Highmark Stadium for the WPIAL Class 3A boys soccer final.

It certainly helped in the preparation that Moon had seen Ambridge twice in Section 2 action, won both matches and outscored the Bridgers 10-2. But that also meant Ambridge had a pretty good book on the Tigers as well.

“We had to go into our bag of tricks,” Moon coach Earl Pannebaker said. “We showed them one formation, then we changed the formation hoping that we could catch them off-guard.”

It worked about as well as it could.

Senior forward and Akron recruit Ryan Kopay took advantage of the opening in the Ambridge (14-7-1) defense caused by the formation alteration. He scored what turned out to be the game-winning goal with 7:40 remaining in the first half to give top-seeded Moon (20-0-1) a 3-0 victory against the No. 11 Bridgers.

“Being on this team, everyone thinks you’re the go-to guy and you’ve got to get the job done,” Kopay said. “But throughout the season, I’ve never had to

be the one who scored the goals.”

Kopay’s goal was extremely important for the Tigers’ game plan to play with the lead and continue to force Ambridge to open up its attack.

“For him to do it as a leader was just outstanding. That helped to open it up,” Pannabaker said. “We knew that if we got the first goal, they would change their formation, open up the back a little bit and help us with what we want to do next.”

With the win, Moon captured its fifth championship overall and first since 2003 when it took the Class 2A crown.

“It validates what we’ve been doing,” Pannabaker said. “You keep with the program, you keep the patience and the discipline and good things will happen.”

Ambridge held its own for most of the first half until Kopay gave the Tigers a 1-0 lead 32:20 into the match.

Their wait was a lot shorter for their second goal.

Off a set piece, sophomore forward Nico Caprini laid out a perfect pass to Preston Korol, who hammered it home with 1:05 left in the first half to stake Moon to a 2-0 lead.

Senior midfielder Ryan Hildenbrand’s capped the score with 29:30 remaining in regulation.

“In the first half, we were more sound offensively. We were connecting more passes and had them a little further back on their heels,” Ambridge coach Ben Fiore said. “Then we lost that chemistry. We had guys stranded high and they countered well.”

Class 4A

Seneca Valley had everything going for it heading into the WPIAL Class 4A final.

There was the fact the Raiders had won the past two titles. They had also beaten Pine-Richland twice previously this season and were unbeaten in their past 50 games (48-0-2) against WPIAL opponents.

They did not get to 51.

Senior midfielder Ben Rishel scored the only goal of the game when he knocked home a loose ball around the net off a direct free kick with 20:50 remaining in regulation to give the No. 6 Rams (15-4-1) a 1-0 win against top-seeded Seneca Valley (18-1-1).

“I’m at a loss for words,” Richel said. “This was a David and Goliath situation.”

It was Seneca Valley’s first loss to a WPIAL team since Butler pulled out a 1-0 decision against the Raiders on Sept. 24, 2020. Pine-Richland was a victim five times in that span, including 3-2 and 5-0 losses in Section 1 action this season.

And they were painfully aware of that streak.

“We were aware because we were on the losing side of it quite a few times,” Richel said. “They blew us out a couple of times. We knew it was going to be tough.”

“This is a journey right here, four years in the making and I’m still in disbelief,” Pine-Richland coach Jordan Wiegand said. “The mantra going into this was, ‘Somebody needs to beat Seneca. Why not us?’ and it’s nice to see all that hard work pay off.”

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