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Noel's goal lifts Middletown past Glenelg, 2-1, in girls 2A state final

Knights finish off 18-0 season, win 1st title since '04 thanks to tally with 8 minutes left

November 20, 2010 | By Todd Karpovich, Special to The Baltimore Sun

The defenders for fifth-ranked Glenelg made sure they kept a close watch on Middletown's explosive forwards, Jacky Kessler and Jenna Caudle, in Saturday night's Class 2A state championship at UMBC.

The duo combined for 45 goals this season, and despite the tight marking, Kessler provided a 1-0 lead early in the second half off a pass from Caudle. After the Gladiators fought back with a goal from Gretchen Gurganus, the Knights escaped with a 2-1 victory on a winner by Mackenzie Noel with eight minutes remaining.

Appearing in its fourth state final in the past five years, Glenelg fell short of a seventh state championship. Middletown finished the season 18-0, outscoring opponents 20-3 in the playoffs, and now has five state championships and its first since 2004.

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"We went in expecting them to put up more pressure than us," Glenelg coach Dean Sheridan said. "We knew we had to take advantage of our opportunities. I would have felt good going into overtime. We knew we had to double-team the ball on Kessler and Caudle. And I think we did a pretty good job."

Middletown controlled the early part of the game by sending long passes to Kessler and Caudle. The two created several chances, but Glenelg's Elizabeth Ebeling, Casey Vantucci and Megan Pawtowski managed to keep them under control. The Gladiators (13-4-2) found their rhythm midway through the first half, and Rachel McCarriher nearly provided the lead in the 26th minute when her shot from 18 yards caromed off the bottom of the crossbar.

"To judge our season on this last game is wrong," Ebeling said. "Our season was much more than this."

The Knights opened the second half on the attack, and Brittany Parrotte hit the crossbar less than a minute into the second half. Almost three minutes later, Caudle pushed a through ball to Kessler, who took two touches before sliding the ball into the far corner for the 1-0 lead.

With the lead, Middletown kept eight players behind the ball, simply knocking away any loose balls. The Gladiators kept pressing, and a cross by Vantucci was flicked by Emily Budman to Gurganus, who tied the game in the 56th minute.

"It was all a blur," Gurganus said. "Once I got it in, I couldn't believe it. After I scored, I knew we had to give it our all. Anything less and it would have turned out like it did. I think we did really good."

Middletown continued to pepper Glenelg's goal with shots, forcing [Brooke Carey](#) to come up with several big saves. But Noel was able to slow a low shot in the corner off a pass from Mary Pritts for the winner.

Danielle Burris came within inches of tying the game with just more than a minute remaining.

"I knew we had the same chance as winning as they did even though we came out as underdogs," Pawtowski said. "We were so close. Everyone just played their hardest and left their heart on the field."

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