

Gooderham’s winner sends Tigers to semifinals

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

It had been five years since the La Grande girls soccer team reached the Class 4A state semifinals.

The wait is over. The Tigers rallied in the second half and Kara Gooderham hit a rocket from 34 yards away for the winning goal in the closing minutes, securing a 2-1 win over the Gladstone Gladiators Saturday night at Community Stadium.

“Holy moly, that was amazing,” Head Coach Kristen Rice said. “I’m so proud of them. They stuck to the game plan, they played hard the whole 80 minutes (and) they finished when we needed. I love it.”

The Tigers’ pressure mounted in the waning minutes of the second half, with La Grande seeing four shots either just miss or get stopped by Gladstone goalkeeper Aaliyah Asad in the final 20 minutes.

The fifth one finally broke through for the win. The Tigers worked the ball up top to Gooderham, who had some space and fired off a missile into the top of the net. Asad got a hand on it, but the ball glanced off her hand and in.

“It was just awesome,” Gooderham said of the shot. “It was a great feeling, and it’s a great feeling to win, especially since we haven’t made it past the quarterfinals in a long time.”

The winning shot even had Rice searching for words.

“I don’t even know what to say,” she said. “(Gooderham) has the strength and the power to do it, and I’m so proud of her for taking that



La Grande’s Kara Gooderham reacts after scoring the game-winning goal in the closing minutes Saturday night against Gladstone.

shot and winning the game for us.” It was the second thriller for the Tigers in four days following Wednesday’s win via penalty kicks

against North Marion. “I knew it wasn’t going to end up like last year,” Lexee Gomes, who scored La Grande’s first goal, said. “We all told each other, ‘We’re not the same team as last year. We’re going to win this one.’ And we did it. I’m so proud of everybody.”

Saturday’s game saw La Grande fall behind for the first time all season. A turnover by the Tigers’ defense led to a shot from about 20 yards by Brianna Lewis that found the net for a 1-0 lead in the 54th minute.

But after getting a couple good looks in a frenetic back-and-forth few minutes of soccer, the Tigers pulled even. Alaina Carson took the ball into the box for a shot and was cut down by Asad, but the net was left open. In the ensuing scrum, Katie Perry hit a header forward and Gomes finished the sequence with a shot from 10 yards to level the score in the 58th minute.

“I knew I was going to get a goal. I was determined,” Gomes said. “I get really nervous when the (other) team scores before us, so I was on it. I was going for that ball.”

Rice commended her team for keeping its composure in the brief four minutes it trailed.

“They didn’t let it get to them,” she said. “They were able to keep it going. They didn’t let it faze them. They kept working hard, and kept working and working until we got the goal.”

The playoffs in general have not been kind to the Tigers since 2013, when they reached the semis en route to a berth in the state title match. Since that last semifinal appearance, La Grande suffered

three first-round losses and a quarterfinal loss — all at home — with the most recent being last year’s 5-1 loss to Molalla in the quarterfinals.

But there was a different attitude Saturday.

“After the first game we (said), ‘OK. We’ve been here before. We know what to do,’” Gooderham said. “We stepped it up from last year and we prepped ourselves really well for this game. I think we knew we could do it all along.”

The senior added the team didn’t flinch when it found itself behind.

“In our heads we were never really down. It’s still a game,” she said. “(We play like) It’s still tied 0-0, and we can always come back.”

Although the first half was scoreless, it saw a display of superb soccer from both teams, one that had Rice pleased at halftime.

“(Coach) said it was one of our best games, for sure,” Gomes said. “She was so proud of us. At halftime she couldn’t stop talking about it. It felt good.”

The offenses opened up more in the second half and traded shots, with some solid play in goal from both Asad and La Grande’s Faith Akers helping keep the match scoreless until the midway point of the second half. Asad finished with seven saves for the Gladiators, while Akers had six for La Grande, including enduring a flurry in the final moments.

The Tigers (14-0 overall) will host defending champion Valley Catholic in the semifinals at 4 p.m. Tuesday at Community Stadium. The Valiants reached the semis with a 2-0 win over Stayton.

La Grande’s defense devours Pelicans in opening round



La Grande’s Chris Woodworth, right, tracks down Klamath Union quarterback Xavier Arvizu for a sack in the first quarter Friday. The Tigers sacked Arvizu five times as they rolled to a 31-0 win in the first round contest.

By Ronald Bond
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Back in August, La Grande quarterback Parker Robinson said he believed the 2018 edition of the Tigers — despite the loss of several key seniors — could get back to the Class 4A quarterfinals, matching what the team accomplished a year ago.

Turns out he was right. Robinson threw an early touchdown pass and ran for another, Nathan Reed had 170 yards rushing and a touchdown, and the La Grande defense had its way as the Tigers dumped the Klamath Union Pelicans Friday afternoon at Community Stadium, 31-0.

“We learned a lot from last year’s seniors, and knowing

with our coaches how intense practices were going to be I just knew that it was going to happen,” Robinson, who had 62 yards passing and 44 rushing, said recalling the August prediction. “We worked hard up to this point.”

Robinson’s eight-yard scoring pass to Blaine Shaw for a 7-0 lead on La Grande’s first drive was one of the few passing attempts from either team during a blustery contest with knocked-over end-zone pylons and swaying goalposts.

The windy afternoon may have played to what has become the Tigers’ strength — their ground game.

La Grande rushed the ball more than usual, and more

than what Head Coach Rich McIlmoil said was the intent. The Tigers totaled 49 rush attempts for 266 yards, both of which were well above their season average.

“I was concerned about the wind,” the coach said. “A couple times we did throw the ball and it sailed a little bit. I was worried about the wind taking the ball and (the Pelicans) getting interceptions. We’ve been working hard to run the football all season, and I think we proved we could do that. I knew we could stick to that, keep the ball on the ground, get yards and score touchdowns.”

Reed did the bulk of the

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Young LHS volleyball drops two at state

By Ronald Bond
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While the La Grande Tigers’ stay at the Class 4A state volleyball tournament was shorter than they hoped, just being there was valuable for Head Coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius’ young squad.

“It was a great experience for us,” she said. “We had our moments.”

La Grande opened Friday with a straight-set loss to eventual state champion Valley Catholic, 25-12, 25-9, 25-9.

“They’re a well-coached team,” Becker-Bisenius said of the Valiants. “They have a big, big hitter (Kayla Robbins). We made some adjustments on her throughout the match. That’s the best team we’ve played all season. They don’t get rattled, and they’re really good.”

Both Presley Justice and Kenzie Williams had four kills for La Grande against the Valiants. Jayce Seavert added three kills. Seavert and Felicity Houston also had 15 digs each, and Jacie

Howton added seven assists. “We were a little nervous, and we played not to lose,” the coach said. “There’s a difference (between) playing to win (and) playing not to lose.”

Becker-Bisenius said La Grande came out strong against Hidden Valley on Saturday and was in position to take the first set, but the Mustangs finished strong to win the opener, 25-23. Hidden Valley took the next two sets, 25-20, 25-15, to win the match, and eventually went on to place fourth.

“They’re a well-coached team and have a couple girls who can hit the ball,” Becker-Bisenius said. “That took it out of our sails when we lost that first game. It was really close.”

Seavert had six kills and Justice added five to lead the Tigers. Houston and Seavert led the defense with 15 and 14 digs, respectively, and Williams had seven assists.

“Overall, I’m proud of my team,” the coach said. “I’m proud of us being here. The outcome wasn’t what I



La Grande’s Jaiden Hafer tips the ball over the net during Saturday’s match against Hidden Valley.

wanted or what we wanted, but to be here considering the circumstances (of losing two key players late in the season) is huge.”

La Grande finishes with an overall record of 17-7, and each player who took the court at state is slated to return for the Tigers in 2019.

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