

Magical season ends in semifinals

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

A goal by Valley Catholic just 13 seconds into the match set the tone early, and a second-half comeback by La Grande came up short as the Tigers' season ended one game shy of the ultimate goal — a trip to the state title match.

Callie Kawaguchi had a hat trick that included the early quick strike, and the Valiants built a 3-0 lead en route to a 4-2 win over La Grande in the Class 4A semifinals Tuesday night at Community Stadium.

"They came out quick and ready. We weren't 100 percent ready, I think," La Grande Head Coach Kristen Rice said. "We were kind of nervous, not sure what to expect, what to do, especially with them getting a goal in 13 seconds. Things happen (but) I am so proud of this group."

The Valiants took the opening kickoff, played a through ball up to Kate MacNaughton who dribbled to the box and passed right to Kawaguchi for the early lead, which knocked La Grande back on its heels. Kawaguchi added another goal in the sixth minute to make it 2-0.

"No other team had done that to us. It probably threw us off our game a little bit," Rice said of the early offense by Valley Catholic.

Valiants' Head Coach Kibwe Cuffie said the decision to attack early was a different plan than the team had applied most of the season.

"Normally we take a little while to get into the flow of things," Cuffie said. "Today we decided from the kickoff, 'If we win the toss we're going to go right after it.' It worked. It was able to give us a good boost right at the beginning."

La Grande settled into the match about midway through the first half and was able to generate offense and find the flow that had carried it the entire season.

"As soon as we realized what happened, we tried to get back on our feet, pick up, not let it drag us down and play our game — score goals



Photos by Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Lexee Gomes, left, and Valley Catholic's Josephine Clark make a play on the ball during Tuesday night's semifinal match at Community Stadium. The Valiants ended La Grande's undefeated season with a 4-2 win.



La Grande's Katie Perry, left, dribbles near midfield against Valley Catholic's Chloe Brock.



La Grande's Caiya Chandler, left, fends off Valley Catholic's Kate MacNaughton for possession.

and do what we know how to do well," Caiya Chandler, one of six seniors who played her last game for the Tigers, said.

An early flurry of offense in the second half saw hope initially crushed before a glimmer returned. Riley McKee scored in the 43rd minute to give Valley Catholic a 3-0 lead, but a minute later Alaina Carson scored on

a scrum in front of the net to finally get the Tigers on the board and spark the team.

"They never stopped playing," Cuffie said of La Grande. "After going down 2-nil, it's easy to drop your head. But credit to them. They never backed down. They came at us."

Rice recognized the same thing in her squad.

"They never gave up. They fought the entire time," she said. "They did great. They worked hard the whole 80 minutes. Win or no win, I'm proud of them."

La Grande played inspired, hoping to draw closer, but the third goal by Kawaguchi, which was fired off from more than 30 yards out, made it a 4-1 game. Audrey

Garlitz scored with about eight minutes left for La Grande, but the Tigers could draw no closer.

"We played our hardest. We played our heart out," La Grande goalkeeper Faith Akers, who had seven saves, said. "Even after the (early) goal we stayed composed. We were fine. We shut them down for a while. I'm so

LOCAL SCHEDULE

Thursday WOMEN'S COLLEGE SOCCER

• Eastern Oregon vs. TBD, CCC semifinals, Springfield, 4 p.m. (if EOU wins today)

MEN'S COLLEGE SOCCER

• Eastern Oregon vs. TBD, CCC semifinals, Springfield, 7 p.m. (if EOU wins today)

Friday COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

• Eastern Oregon vs. College of Idaho, CCC semifinals, Ashland, 3:30 p.m.

PREP FOOTBALL

• La Grande at Gladstone, Class 4A state quarterfinals, 6 p.m.

— Subject to change

proud of how we played tonight even though we lost."

In addition to having size, Akers said Valley Catholic did an excellent job of playing together.

"They work really well, and had some really good set plays back to the midfielders," she said. "Honestly I wish them nothing but the best at state."

The season ends for La Grande at 14-1 overall and ends a two-year stretch at 27-2.

"Me and the other seniors feel like we had an amazing season," Chandler said. "We won every game (until Tuesday). We really gave it our all, played hard and worked well as a team."

For the seniors who were with La Grande all four years, this concludes a run that saw the Tigers go 46-7-2, win the Greater Oregon League four times and get as far in the playoffs as a La Grande team had since 2013.

"They've been the heart and soul of this team for years," Rice said of the outgoing seniors. "A lot of sad girls out there. They wanted to go all the way, but this senior group was awesome. They're just amazing. I love them."

Bama stays at No.1, Michigan up to No. 4

The Associated Press

Michigan moved into the fourth spot of the College Football Playoff rankings Tuesday night, behind Alabama, Clemson and Notre Dame.

Georgia was next at five, followed by Oklahoma.

The playoff picture cleared up after a weekend where several contenders asserted themselves. The top-four teams in the final rankings Dec. 2 will play in the national semifinals.

The Crimson Tide easily dispatched LSU from the top four, beating the Tigers 29-0. LSU, though, only dropped to No. 7 after its second loss,

ahead of Washington State, West Virginia and Ohio State — all with only one loss.

Selection committee chairman Rob Mullens noted LSU's three victories against teams the committee has ranked this week (Mississippi State, Auburn and Georgia).

"Their defense is extremely strong," said Mullens, the Oregon athletic director. "Their two losses come against No. 1 Alabama, on the road to Florida."

Unbeaten Notre Dame moved up one spot to No. 3, and Michigan jumped a spot after a 42-7 victory against Penn State.

With four weeks left in the

season, nine of the top 10 teams are serious contenders. LSU is basically out, because the Tigers have no chance to win a conference title.

Assuming the top three unbeaten teams would get in by winning out, here are the paths to the playoff.

NO. 1 ALABAMA (9-0)

The Tide is already locked into the SEC championship game and has built up enough equity that even a regular-season loss to Mississippi State or Auburn won't keep Tua Tagovailoa and Co. out of the playoff. Now if they lost twice ... yeah, that's probably not happening. The only

intrigue involving Alabama is whether the Tide could lose the SEC championship game, finish 12-1 and still get in? The chances are probably decent.

NO. 2 CLEMSON (9-0)

Like Alabama, the Tigers have some room for a regular-season misstep, but their position is not as strong as the Tide's. With a loss to ACC Atlantic rival Boston College on Saturday, Clemson would be at risk of being shut out of the conference title game. Ohio State and Alabama both made the playoff at 11-1, without even playing for a league title the last two seasons. The Tigers could, too, but it is no slam dunk.

FOOTBALL CONTEST WINNERS!

Oct. 29

1ST RAY MORENO, LG (MISSED 2)
2ND RICH VAUGHAN, ISLAND CITY (MISSED 3, CLOSEST TIEBREAKER)
3RD VAL HOPKINS, LG (MISSED 3)

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