

KSPORTS



Isabella Walker (3) heads the ball to a cutting teammate. Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

Celts rally falls just short against Sprague

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Facing a 3-1 deficit at the start of the second half against Sprague, the McNary girls' soccer squad got a pair of goals from sophomore forward Sydnee Alfano to tie up the score. But the rally fell short as the Olympians were able to score a controversial goal in the 67th minute to propel themselves to a 4-3 victory over the Celtics.

The Sprague attack got numerous opportunities early in the game. McNary goalkeeper Hannah Ferguson stopped three shots in the first 10 minutes, but the Olys got one through in the 16th minute when Aspen DeConcini raced by the entire Celtics back line to score the first of her three goals.

McNary, however, responded moments later when Tessa Fisher found a soft spot in the Sprague defense and fired a rocket into the top-right corner of



the net for the goal. But DeConcini got by the McNary defense to score again less than a minute later.

With 25 seconds left in the first half, Sprague was awarded a corner kick, which was placed near the front edge of the box by McKenzie Wernicke. Ferguson got her hands on the kick, but the ball trickled off her gloves and went right to DeConcini who put in the easy goal to give her squad the two-score lead going into the break.

Despite the deficit, the Celtics looked like a whole new team at the start of the second half.

"We really picked it up in the second

half," Alfano said. "We worked together really well."

At the 50-minute mark, McNary midfielder Kennedy Buss launched a 50-yard free kick into the middle of the box. With the keeper out of position, Alfano was able to get a touch at point-blank range to get the ball across the plane for the goal.

"I kind of just threw my body in front of it and it got in there," Alfano said.

Just seven minutes later, Alfano struck again to tie the game.

After getting past a double-team, Alfano tightroped the sideline without stepping out-of-bounds, giving herself some separation from the defense, then fired a shot aimed at the top of the post from about 30 yards away. The Sprague keeper tried to elevate for the save, but the ball glanced off her hands and into the back of the net.

"Sydnee is an amazing player. She has the confidence to take those shots because she is super dangerous," McNary head coach Lauren Brouse said. "Her just getting the ball on her foot and looking for those opportunities to shoot really made the difference in the second half."

"I just did this move where I cut in on the sideline and I just got a really good shot off," Alfano added.

Along with creating more opportunities on the offensive end, the Celtics tightened things up on the defensive side.

"Sprague loves to throw people forward and switch on their runs a ton, so the key was talking and doing a better

job of passing those girls on, instead of trying to follow them and getting out of position," Brouse said.

Senior Caitlin Huffman took over the goalkeeping duties in the second half for the Celtics and stopped several shots in her first 25 minutes in the net. But Sprague was barely able to get the go-ahead goal past her with 13 minutes remaining.

Wernicke created some space for herself in the middle of the field and kicked a shot aimed at the left post. Huffman appeared to have made a diving stop, but the ball slipped out of her hands and matriculated a few inches towards the net.

While laying on the ground, Huffman reached out and retrieved the ball and looked to pass it to a teammate. Initially, there was no whistle to signal that a goal had been scored. But after multiple Sprague players pleaded with the head official, the referees determined that the ball did cross the goal line and gave Sprague credit for the goal.

McNary had a chance to tie in the final four minutes when Karla Rodriguez found Alfano with a cross-field pass, but Alfano was unable to get a good touch on the ball and her shot sailed right of the net.

Despite the defeat, Brouse said she was pleased with the way her girls played in the second half.

"They are so coachable, so when we could finally talk to them at halftime and tell them what they needed to do, they went out and did it," Brouse said.

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