

Goals, and wins, evade Lions

Cottage Grove girls' soccer continues to struggle

By Zach Silva
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It has been a season of what-could-have-been moments for the Cottage Grove girls' soccer team (1-4-1). Aside from their opening 10-0 loss at Philomath, the games they have lost have been by margins of two, three and one goal apiece. First year head coach Reed Levings still wants more from the team that won three games last season.

"I'm a little upset," said Levings after Tuesday's loss at home to Elmira. "They were beatable. They were a beatable team and we just couldn't get the ball in the back of the net."

Tuesday's game started with the Lions controlling possession for the first 10 minutes of play. In clear control of the game, the team was creating offensive chances that were stymied by the Falcons defense. After a giveaway on their own half, Falcons striker Jaden Blunt took advantage as she broke away, outsprinted the Lions defense and slipped the ball past goalie Irene Ferguson for her first of two goals on the game.

Blunt's second goal came 10 minutes later when Falcons pressure led to another breakaway that the Lions were not able to stop. For the rest of the half the Lions struggled to consistently string multiple passes together and when they were close to the goal posed no real threat to score.

"We controlled the field," said Levings on the opening minutes of the game. "When we make good passes to each other it's an easier game but we ended up just kicking the ball and running and chasing. All I asked them at halftime is just make good passes on the ground. Play to feet and then the goals will come."

After stressing this message of getting back to the basics, the Lions started finding some opportunities including multiple corner kicks that forced Elmira to have to make stops. Defensively Ferguson made multiple saves and it looked the Lions looked to finally break free when Chelsea Armstrong got past the Falcons back line and seemed to score but was called for offsides.

With just under 10 minutes left, Elmira was awarded a penalty kick where Kaycee Monagon took advantage and scored with a screamer from 30 yards out to put the Falcons up 3-0 and seal the victory.

Despite the loss, Levings commended the team for their effort on the pitch.

"They didn't give up. They played until the very last minute and that's all I can ask," said Levings. "Gosh, I'm still just so upset."

On Thursday the Lions fell to Sutherlin on the road 2-1.

Lions too much for Falcons to handle



A swarm of Cottage Grove defenders take down Elmira's running back.

PHOTO BY JORDAN HAGEWOOD

Cottage Grove football stays perfect as they beat Elmira on the road

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While they got the win, Cottage Grove football's 41-18 win at Elmira was not something they were pleased with. The Falcons (2-1) and Lions (4-0) both came into the game undefeated and looking to make a statement in the first Sky-Em league game of the season for each team.

While this season's Cottage Grove team has been a staple of speed and efficient scoring, this game did not start that way for the Lions. It all began in a sloppy fashion with each team fumbling on their first possessions of the game.

On the Lions next possession they looked like they were back to their old selves as they scored in four plays. That was capped by quarterback Dylan Graves finding a wide-open Hayden Glenn for a 38-yard touchdown reception to put the Lions up 7-0.

Coming into the week, the message that Elmira's head coach Justin Peeler had been preaching was that they were going to run the ball all game. While the Falcons offense is predicated on their rushing attack, their passing took a backseat this game. During the week junior starting quarterback Rowdy Ramirez broke his hand which opened up the job to freshman Cobyn Herbert.

The Falcons were focused solely on running the ball and each of Herbert's early pass attempts were an adventure. Down a score and facing a 4th and 10 outside of field goal range, Herbert dropped back for the first time of the game when a group of Lions quickly sacked him for an eight-yard loss and a turnover on downs.

Herbert's next two forays into passing were more

of the same. After Graves threw an interception, Elmira had the ball facing a long 3rd and eight. Herbert dropped back for the second time and was met by Cottage Grove's Colton Benner who stripped the ball and ran into the end zone for a touchdown. On the next drive, Herbert found himself dropped back and on his first actual first pass of the game he was then intercepted by Cottage Grove's Jacob Woods.

The Lions offense started to roll and Juice Clafin ran into the end zone for one of his two rushing touchdowns of the game.



Cottage Grove's Juice Clafin looks to overpower the Falcons defense on Friday night.

PHOTO BY JORDAN HAGEWOOD

Now up 20-0, the Lions were rolling. They stopped Elmira and then on 4th and 26 from the Elmira 28 Graves rolled left to find Woods in the corner of the endzone for the score.

After an Elmira fumble on the ensuing kickoff, the Lions recovered and struck quickly. This time they used a trick play that resulted in receiver Giffen finding quarterback Graves downfield for the 30-yard touchdown to put Cottage Grove up 34-0 in the first half.

"It felt great," said Graves on getting to be a receiver. "This is my first time playing quarterback since middle school. I played receiver my freshman and sophomore year so it's just going back to the old days."

In addition to his touchdown reception, Graves finished the game 13-of-17 for 163 yards with one touchdown pass and an interception.

Head coach Gary Roberts was also pleased with the execution of Graves trick play.

"[Offensive Coordinator Marty] Johnson is big on after we get a turnover... we're going to do what we call sudden change plays. We're going to try and take advantage of something and hit them with a home run. We were fortunate enough tonight that we executed it pretty well," said Roberts.

Elmira scored on the next possession and at half-time Cottage Grove was up 34-6. But despite the score, Roberts was not pleased with how the team played.

"First half was kind of going through the motions, it wasn't very graceful," said Roberts. "I lit us up a little bit at halftime. We did some things that were a little uncharacteristic of what a good football team is."

The second half saw Cottage Grove score just once, a Clafin rushing touchdown, and Elmira started to work the ball downfield and even complete multiple passes. The Falcons found the end zone twice and continued to go for two each time and failed on each attempt.

While Cottage Grove won by a wide margin, won their 14th regular season game in a row and started league play out with a win, the Lions were not happy with how they played.

"The game definitely wasn't what we wanted," said Woods who finished the game with 82 yards receiving, a touchdown and an interception. "We definitely didn't execute like we should. So there is a lot to pick up next week and we've got to fix the little things."

On Friday, the Lions will be hosting Sweet Home who are 4-0 on the season and have given up just 20 points total in those games.

"Overall, in the second half I was much happier with our effort. But you know our kids are smart enough to know... they weren't as good as they should be," said Roberts. "And they know they have to be that sharp next week playing Sweet Home or else. Sweet Home won't put the ball on the ground four times in the first half. They are going to take care of the football and make it tough on us."

Athlete of the Week



This week's athlete of the week was Cottage Grove goalie Zach Stewart. Last week the Lions scored big and held their two opponents to one goal. For a complete recap of last Thursday's 9-0 win, turn to B4.



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