

Arcata soccer clinches Big 5

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ARCATA - The Arcata girl's soccer teams got sweet revenge on Friday, knocking off Eureka 1-0 and clinching another Humboldt-Del Norte Conference title in the process.

Danna Wahlund had scored all four Logger goals in the teams' previous meeting as Eureka beat Arcata for the first time in six years, but Arcata was still in first place heading into Friday's final game.

That meant they could afford to tie Eureka and still win league and the automatic North Coast Section playoff bid, but after the loss early in the season, they weren't interested in a draw.

"We came in knowing a tie would give us the league, but we didn't want to settle for that," said Arcata head coach Ahmed Soliman. "We wanted to win."

For most of the game, however, a tie looked inevitable. It was deadlocked 0-0 until the 86th minute, but just when it seemed the "There's-not-enough-scoring-in-soccer" arguments would begin, Arcata's Karen Pontoni outran the last Eureka defender and slipped the ball past Logger goalkeeper Bianca Herrera.

"Early on it was more of a defensive game, both teams were trying to feel each other out and see what the other team would do," Soliman said.

But in the second half, Arcata was more aggressive, dominating possession and field position.

"We went in and we talked (at halftime), and we figured out their strategy," Soliman said. "We made some changes and were able to control the second half."

After Pontoni's goal, the Tigers had to withstand a furious final assault from Eureka. The Loggers played like a wounded, uh, tiger, but were denied on at least three quality chances in the waning minutes.

"It was just all heart," Soliman said of his team's final stand. "They got a couple of lucky breaks, it got by our keeper (Keri Lorig), but our sweeper (Hannah Noonan) came back and saved it off the

line. Then (Lorig) came back and made the best save of her season."

But it wasn't just in the last few minutes that the Tigers' defenders earned their stripes. They didn't give Eureka's powerful forwards, Wahlund, Alli Greene and Kayla Throgmorton any room to work on the wings.

Katie Andrews did a particularly good job shutting down Wahlund, as the two seemed to be connected at the hip most of the day.

"Katie was marking Danna the whole game," Soliman said. "Katie came and shut Danna out."

Eureka's defense played just as well, matching Arcata every step of the way, until Pontoni broke through late, sending her team and the home crowd into a frenzy.

Arcata now waits to see who they'll play in the NCS playoffs. Eureka has a good shot at an at-large bid, but they have to plead their case at the seeding meetings.