

Spartans Ride Corner Kicks to Defeat Knights in Rivalry Match



Photographer Hannah Medlin

Sophomore wing back Lauren Shah prepares to knock the ball up the field in a match with FZW on 4/13.

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It's been just under a year since the two teams last met back on May 18 in Districts, a game that saw the Spartans take down the Lady Knights by a score of 4-1. Now, on a windy and brisk night at Howell North, the two divisional rivals had their first meeting of the new season. With it being such a critical rivalry match, the players entered the game with a bit of added motivation to take down their familiar opponent.

"It's a pride thing," senior Maddy Wood said. "You always want to beat your rival no matter what. Even if the competition is really good, you still want to give it your best shot and win."

This added energy that both the Knights and Spartans played with could be seen in the early stages of the match. In the opening 10 minutes of play, freshman Julia Kristensen had a pair of chances for FHN, one coming from 30 yards out that went just over the crossbar and another off of a free kick where she was left unmarked but headed it straight into the hands of goalkeeper Caitlyn Brown.

The first 20 minutes of the match were dominated by Howell North, both in terms of possession and in chances on goal. However, senior Bailey Beeler opened the scoring for either side off of a corner kick where she was unguarded by the Knights defense and found the bottom corner to beat Caty Arnold. This was the first of three goals off of corners on the night for Howell Central.

“It was a focus issue,” head coach Mark Olwig said on his team’s struggles against corners. “We need to go over some responsibilities but we were caught flat footed on all of them.”

At the end of the first half, the Knights trailed their rival Spartans by a score of 1-0 despite a strong start to the contest. Entering the second half, Howell North looked to get off to another positive start as they did in the opening 20 minutes, but Howell Central was able to hold the Knights off and score on back-to-back corners, with goals coming from sophomores Jay Viola and Mackenzie Jones. This extended the visitors lead to 3-0 over Howell North.

Down by three, the Knights were in need of something special to try and turn the momentum around. Junior Sam Cary delivered just that. Moments after missing a one-on-one by a few inches, the Knights were rewarded a free kick from 30 yards out after Julia Kristensen was fouled around the 20 yard line. In stepped Cary, who blasted it over the wall and into the top right corner to make it a 3-1 game.

“That’s what you want, when you get a free kick like that, to have someone that can strike the ball and make sure it’s on frame,” Olwig said. “And she [Cary] did a really good job of striking the ball, she didn’t chip it or flight it over so that’s a positive.”

The Spartans were able to keep these positives to a minimum, however, as they controlled the ball for most of the second half after Cary’s goal and closed out the match, winning by a final score of 3-1. The biggest struggle for the Knights in the match, from the team’s perspective, was their inability to sustain a stable attack.

“We were all just a little bit behind,” Kristensen said. “I don’t think we were mentally prepared to get forward because defensively we weren’t too bad as they just scored from corner kicks and we haven’t really worked on that, we mainly just had a problem getting forward.”

The loss dropped Howell North to a record of 2-2-1, while Central improved to 5-2 on the season. The Knights next opportunity to get back at their rival Spartans is on April 19, where they’ll travel to FHC. Before then, the varsity girls team will try to figure out what went wrong last night in order to have a stronger showing in their next meeting with the Spartans.

“We need to learn how to read each other better and probably watch the tape over and see where our mistakes were and what we can do better,” Wood said.



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