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GIRLS SOCCER PLAYOFFS; Taft seals its victory over CC King with kiss

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After surviving two overtimes and 15 rounds of a shootout, the soccer ball in front of Taft sophomore Elizabeth Stewart was covered in sweat, grass and dirt. But Stewart still bent down and planted her lips on it before she took a shot.

"I didn't care how dirty that ball was, I was going to kiss it," she said. "At that point, we needed any luck we could get."

The kiss helped lift Taft to a thrilling 3-2 shootout victory over Corpus Christi King at Northside Athletic Complex on Tuesday in front of about 400.

Stewart, Taft's 15th shooter, waited for King's goalkeeper to challenge and took a low shot that rolled into the left corner of the net for the victory.

With Taft's victory in a bidistrict-round doubleheader, the Raiders move on to the area round against Churchill. O'Connor, a 3-1 winner over Corpus Christi Carroll on Tuesday, will play Reagan. The time and place of both games will be determined today.

Taft (15-7) survived its first playoff game since 2002 thanks to junior goalkeeper Brittany Sullivan, who made 10 saves in the shootout alone. The teams were tied 2-2 after regulation and two 10-minute overtimes, and both teams scored twice in the first 14 rounds of the shootout.

Taft seniors **Cristina Mercedes** and Jazmin Carmona scored the Raiders' two goals in regulation. Taft led late in the second half, but King (17-4-1) scored an equalizer in the 72nd minute to force the overtime.

Carmona hit Taft's first attempt in the shootout, and sophomore Lina DeLaRosa also made a shot in the 13th round. King freshman Tina Robles made both of the Mustangs' shots in the third and 13th round of the shootout.

King went first in the shootout, and Sullivan challenged its 15th-round shot and punched it away.

"My legs are Jell-O," said Sullivan, who had her own stroke of luck -- a two-dollar bill tucked in her jersey. "I'm exhausted, but I've never felt better."

Sullivan's save set up Stewart, a defender, who was taking her first shot of the match. Taft coach Scott Davis told her to shoot low if King keeper Morgan Weikleeng challenged her. Stewart did, and she and Sullivan were dogpiled after the victory.

"I had a lot of confidence in Sullivan," Davis said. "And thank God the last one went in."

Taft's victory even distracted No. 10 O'Connor playing on the next field. The

Panthers (14-7) fell behind 1-0 at halftime while many players were peering over to watch the overtime and shootout. As soon as Taft was done, the Panthers scored three second-half goals. Karleigh Zolinski scored twice, and freshman Victoria Vazquez added a goal.

"We definitely weren't focused early on," Zolinski said. "Everybody was wondering what was going on with Taft. The captains had to get mad at each other to get us focused, and that got us going in the second half."

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