

Falcons Edge Bobcats On Penalty Kicks

Written by Whitney Noble

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Britt Polly made nine saves and converted the decisive penalty kick to propel the Pfeiffer University women's soccer team into Saturday's Conference Carolinas

Tournament Championship match against Belmont Abbey College, as the Falcons upset top-seeded Lees-McRae College by a 4-1 margin in a penalty shootout to break a scoreless draw on Thursday night at the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex.

Lees-McRae (12-5-2) controlled possession and play in the midfield for much of the match, outshoot Pfeiffer (10-6-3) by a 24-11 margin, including a 7-3 advantage in extra time. Polly made nine saves to keep a clean sheet for the Falcons, as Kaitlyn Briggs (Oviedo, Fla.) stopped five shots to record a shutout of her own.

Kaitlyn Kerrigan (Lakewood Ranch, Fla.) and Sarah Mahar (Jacksonville, Fla.) paced the Bobcats with five and four shots, respectively, as Mahar put a pair of attempts on frame. Seniors Mary Dorn (Shallotte, N.C.) and Emily Jones (Leonardtown, Md.) each tallied three shots in the match, as Dorn paced the Bobcat backline to its 28th clean sheet in her three-year tenure in the Green and Gold.

Aaliyah Jackson and Brittany Papaj launched four and three shots, respectively, toward goal in the match while each putting two attempts on frame.

The first 20 minutes featured a fantastic pace of play on both sides of the pitch, with each team making several attempts at goal, including a cheeky hesitation and turn by Mahar that sailed just wide of the woodwork in the 19th minute. Briggs made one of the saves of the match in the 24th minute, parrying a point-blank effort by Jackson after a near costly turnover in the back by the Bobcats.

Pfeiffer had a great chance cut out by Briggs in the 38th minute, when Jackson nearly got on the end of a cross from the end line before the Bobcat keeper came off her line to corral the delivery. The teams would head into the interval deadlocked at 0-0, with Lees-McRae holding an 8-3 advantage in attempts at goal.

Mahar nearly broke the deadlock out of the break in the 52nd minute, when she made a lovely move to slice inside for an attempt from 20 yards that was parried by Polly. After MaryBeth Sullivan (Greensboro, N.C.) forced a skillful stop by the Falcon keeper in the 57th minute, Dorn came within inches of the breakthrough in the 67th minute, when Polly was given no alternative but to palm the senior's free kick over the bar from 30 yards out.

Dorn nearly beat the Falcon keeper with a curling set piece in the 84th minute, bending a free kick on frame from 25 yards distance before Katlyn Stevens came within inches of catching Briggs off her line in the 86th, sending an effort toward the top corner from just outside the area. The match would go to extra time deadlocked at 0-0, with neither side finding the frame in the first 10 minutes of added time. Lees-McRae controlled much of the second extra time period, sending two shots on frame in the opening five minutes before finding the woodwork twice within a seven-second span just before time.

Pfeiffer led off the penalty shootout with Brittany Papaj converting into the bottom corner, as Polly made a clutch diving stop on Sullivan to give the Falcons a 1-0 advantage. After Sarah Yates found the corner with her attempt and Kerrigan answered with a conversion to trim the

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margin to 2-1, Kayla Rodriguez pushed it to 3-1 before Polly beat her counterpart low and to the right to clinch the shootout for the Falcons.

Lees-McRae is expected to return to 18 letter-winners from this year's Conference Carolinas regular season championship squad, including rising seniors Alicia Pierson (Brooksville, Fla.), LeeAnn Sullivan (Greensboro, N.C.), Kerrigan, and MaryBeth Sullivan.

Photo Courtesy: Sarah Mahar, LMC Athletics