

Top-Seeded Bobcats Eliminated By King

Written by Whitney Noble

Tuesday, 05 November 2013 08:36

The top-seeded Lees-McRae College women's soccer team suffered a heartbreaking loss in the quarterfinal round of the Conference Carolinas Tournament on Monday evening, falling by a 1-0 score to eighth-seeded King University despite out-shooting the Tornado by a 34-3 margin in the match.

Lees-McRae (10-7-1) controlled the run of play for much of the match, dominating possession and outshooting King (6-10-2) by a 34-3 stretch in the contest, including an 18-2 advantage in the second half. The Bobcats were awarded all seven of the contest's corner kicks, as King capitalizing on its only shot on frame to snap Lees-McRae's 10-match unbeaten streak and end the Bobcats' shutout stretch at 837:41.

Monday's heartbreaking loss brings four of the program's most memorable careers to a close, as seniors LeeAnn Sullivan (Greensboro, N.C.), MaryBeth Sullivan (Greensboro, N.C.), Kaitlyn Kerrigan (Fishers, Ind.) and Alicia Pierson (Brooksville, Fla.) cap their tenures in the Green and Gold after leading the Bobcats to three straight conference titles, including the school's first-ever appearance in the NCAA Tournament in 2011.

MaryBeth Sullivan caps one of the top scoring careers in program history, finishing her four-year tenure with the Bobcats with 30 goals, 19 assists, and 79 points. The Greensboro, N.C. native ends her career ranked 10th in school history in both goals and points, earning all-Conference Carolinas in three straight seasons while garnering a trio of all-region selections. Perhaps her best career performance came as a freshman in 2011, when she netted her first collegiate hat trick and added two assists in a dominating win over Coker.

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LeeAnn Sullivan enjoyed perhaps her best season this fall, leading the Bobcat backline to 10 clean sheets while playing every minute at left back. The senior defender has tallied two goals and two assists in her career with the Bobcats, earning a spot on the all-Conference Carolinas Third team in 2012 while netting her second collegiate goal at Pfeiffer on Homecoming Weekend.

Kerrigan concludes an outstanding career, capping her tenure with the Bobcats ranked third in program history with 34 career assists. A native of Fishers, Ind., Kerrigan has posted at least seven assists in each season, including a career-high 11 helpers as part of a 19-point campaign in 2010. Kerrigan put together perhaps her best overall season in 2012, earning a pair of all-region selections and garnering all-Conference Carolinas First team honors.

Pierson capped her Bobcat career in style last Wednesday night, pitching a shutout against Queens University of Charlotte while making six saves, including a last-second diving stop at the close of the second extra time period. The Brooksville, Fla. native posted a 0.78 goals against average in her career, posting a 5-0 record in 2012 while allowing just one goal in more than 350 minutes.

Sophomore Sarah Mahar (Jacksonville, Fla.) paced the Bobcats with a match-high 11 shots, including four on target, as junior Meagan Thornton (Millville, N.J.) added eight attempts with four on frame. Erica Allen (Norton, Ohio) chipped in four shots, as LeeAnn Sullivan, Phenix Durham (Waxhaw, N.C.), and Mallory Overholt (Grand Bend, Ontario, Canada) each attempted a pair of shots.

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Paula Doran tallied the lone goal of the match for the Tornado, connecting on her only shot of the night, as goalkeeper Nicole Dagher made 12 saves between the pipes to earn the shutout. Shalisa Barnett added an assist for the Tornado.

The Bobcats peppered Dagher's goal throughout the match, putting seven shots on frame in the first half, as freshman Cheyenne Warrick (Pikeville, N.C.) came inches away from the breakthrough in the 43rd minute, sending a rocket just over the bar following a long run through the heart of the King defense.

King claimed a 1-0 advantage against the run of play in the 58th minute, as Barnett led a counter attack down the flank, which culminated in an open net volley by Doran after Barnett's cross sneaked just over the keeper's outstretched fingertips.

The Bobcats answered with a concerted push, pushing forward with greater urgency while forcing five saves by Dagher over the final 30 minutes. Perhaps the Bobcats' best chance came midway through the 67th minute, when Thornton cut in from the flank and unleashed a curling strike bound for the far corner, only to have her effort turned aside by a brilliant diving stop from Dagher.

Mahar nearly netted the equalizer with a pair of late opportunities, sending a turnaround strike

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inches over the bar in the 85th minute before forcing a skillful stop by Dagher in the 86th.

The Tornado defense would hold on, weathering the storm and completing the upset with a late stand to move on to the semifinal round with the program's first-ever NCAA postseason victory and the school's first win over the Bobcats since 2007.

Lees-McRae is expected to return 19 letter-winners from this year's Conference Carolinas regular season championship squad, including rising seniors Ariana Smith (Jackson, N.J.), Kaitlyn Briggs (Oviedo, Fla.), and Thornton.