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## Titans fulfill destiny

Resilient Tuscarora fights past Reservoir, claims 3rd state title with talent, clutch plays

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Tuscarora High School girls soccer team captains, from left, Brittany Clemons, Claire Kelly and Michelle Rock hold the championship trophy after defeating Reservoir High School 3-2 for the state title.

Graham Cullen

CATONSVILLE -- Tuscarora's Holly Kipe, an unassuming freshman who was advised to sit out this soccer season because of a lower leg injury, scored what proved to be the deciding goal.

And the Titans' Brittany Chatfield, a quick-thinking back, hurried into an open net just in time to block what would've been a huge goal for Reservoir.

Tuscarora looked like a team that was simply destined to win a state title on Thursday.

Dominating most of the night and getting clutch plays from players like Kipe and Chatfield, the Titans won the third state crown in team history by beating the Gators, 3-2, in the Class 3A State girls soccer championship at UMBC.

The Titans lost to this same Reservoir team in a season-opening tournament and were trailing 1-0 in Thursday's rematch. But Tuscarora quickly rebounded with an offense that applied constant pressure and a defense that allowed few scoring opportunities.

After the final horn sounded, a mob of Titans hugged and jumped on each other in celebration.

"It was so happy, you wanted to cry. But it was so happy where you couldn't cry," said Aaran Parry, another freshman who emerged as Tuscarora's top scorer this season. "You just kept that smile on your face."

Tuscarora's first two state titles in 2004 and 2005 were basically expected. While the program is traditionally strong, it didn't seem like the sure preseason pick to capture the 3A state title.

"I don't know if the expectations were as high with this group coming in from all over, as they were for those early teams," Tuscarora coach Mark Wolcott said. "They are just an incredibly disciplined, resilient, passionate group that has given everything on the field you could've asked for."

Kipe epitomizes that resiliency. A lingering leg injury started acting up during the preseason, and Kipe's availability to play any sport -- she also plays basketball -- was in doubt.

"They suggested a whole year of not doing anything. She just refused to not do this," Wolcott said. "She's fought through an incredible amount of pain."

Kipe played all season, but the Titans were careful with her. The talented player usually came off the bench, seeing limited minutes, and she usually took a day off from practice after games.

It was an accomplishment for her just to get on the field this season, let alone score huge postseason goals. After scoring a crucial goal in Tuscarora's regional final win over Quince Orchard, Kipe struck again Thursday.

Settling a high ball that came from Emily Marshall, Kipe quickly banged a shot from 10 yards out that zipped into the upper right side of the net, giving the Titans a 3-1 lead with 22 minutes, 27 seconds left in the second half.

That goal loomed large when Reservoir's Kelsey Reiff scored with 8:21 left, and it came from someone who didn't have enough of an ego to think she'd even come off the bench.

"I really didn't expect to be playing," Kipe said. "We have great starters, and I knew it was going to be an intense game."

The intensity reached a fevered pitch when Reservoir's Reiff closed in for a breakaway shot with the match tied 1-1 at the 30:50 mark of the second half. Titans keeper Sarah Jo Hayden blocked the shot, but the ball bounced off her hands as she fell to the turf.

Reservoir's Stephanie Zaycer got the rebound and looked like she'd get to shoot at an open net. But Chatfield scooted into the net and managed get a foot on Zaycer's shot, sending the ball away from the goal line.

What was Chatfield thinking?

"Get the ball out," Chatfield said.

Count Hayden among the relieved.

"When I saw her get that ball, I was getting up, I was like, 'Oh yes, thank you for covering my butt, Brittany,'" Hayden said.

With momentum from that play, the Titans scored the go-ahead goal less than three minutes later. After Parry's free kick from the left side (it was like a corner kick, only six yards closer to the goal), Annie Wickett scored a point-blank goal with her back heel after the ball glanced off the keeper's hand.

Despite falling behind 1-0 and giving up a late goal, the Titans thoroughly dominated possession. Tuscarora routinely beat Reservoir to 50-50 balls, and Gators (14-4-1) coach Joshua Sullivan said that rarely happened to his team. When asked why at the postgame press conference, Sullivan shrugged, then he agreed with a nearby Gators player who said this rare event happened because Tuscarora was simply good.

Tuscarora's attack applied constant pressure, which rushed the Gators backs and prevented them from sending good passes to the midfield. Parry and senior Michelle Rock led the way, and they generated Tuscarora's first goal.

Parry stole a Reservoir pass, dribbled and fired a shot from the left side that bounced off keeper Marissa Dearden's hands. Rock punched in the rebound from six yards out, tying the match 1-1 with 10:17 left in the first half.

Tuscarora (15-3-1) was on its way to its third state title, and the first crown for this group.

"I wasn't thinking we were going to come this far because we had lost some good players," Wickett said. "But we pulled it together and made it through."