

## Althoff saves Cougars again

Written by Tom Fruehling

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A dead cinch to be ranked the state's best in the next poll on Tuesday, the Kennedy boys soccer team dodged a scare Saturday afternoon against 12th-ranked Linn-Mar.

On a rare sunny day at Kingston Stadium, the two traditional rivals played cat-and-mouse for 80 minutes of regulation and two overtimes before the Cougars finally broke the scoreless tie with an 8-7 shootout victory.

"We were very lucky we didn't lose in the second overtime," said Kennedy co-coach Steve Robertson. "One inch to the left and the ball would have gone in."

As it was, with 5:37 to go in the second extra period, a Lion shot hit inside the left goal post but bounced outside the net.

In the marathon shootout session, each team missed one try as they went back and forth to a 7-7 deadlock.

Kennedy was wide right on its next attempt, but goal keeper Nathan Althoff made a clutch stop to keep the Cougars alive.

He then smothered another after Nick Waterhouse put Kennedy up by one with a rocket to the right corner of the goal.

"Nate's been doing that all year," said Robertson. "He's been great in tight games getting saves

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exactly when we need them.”



In his first year as a starter, the junior Althoff said it's been a trial by fire.

“At the start of the year, I couldn't stop a penalty kick,” he said.

But in helping preserve Kennedy's 7-0 start (with six wins against ranked teams), he has now recorded four shutouts and has allowed less than one goal a game.

“I give all the credit to the back line,” Althoff said. “They've been phenomenal. They make my job easier.”

Robertson singled out Mitch Bobbin and Nik Newcamp for their strong play this season.

“They're back there directing the defense and cutting things off before it becomes a problem,” Robertson said. “They're both very smart players.”

For Linn-Mar Coach Corey Brinkmeyer, the narrow defeat was seen as an opportunity lost.

Robertson acknowledged that his squad didn't play its best.

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"This is the first game when we didn't seem to be mentally ready," he said.

But the Lions, now 6-2 with their other loss to current No.1 Prairie , couldn't put the ball in the net when it counted.

"We had our chances," Brinkmeyer said, "but we just didn't take advantage of our opportunities.

"We had the ball in front of the goal but came up short.

"I really thought we played well enough to win."

Still, Brinkmeyer took some consolation from the nail-biting defeat.

"If Kennedy is now No.1," he said, "then we're No. 1B."