

When the wind-chill temperature dips into the mid-40's and there's a frigid gale whipping across the field, the last thing anyone wants is a soccer match that goes into overtime.

Paige Diebold spared all the fans who brought their winter coats, stocking caps and blankets to John Wall Field Thursday night when she scored the only goal as Xavier blanked Prairie, 1-0, in a Mississippi Valley Conference match.

Diebold connected from about 30 yards with 29 minutes, 17 seconds left in the second half when she lofted a shot that eluded the Prairie goal-keeper and nestled softly into the back of the net.

"We connected all the way from the back and then the shot was open," Diebold said about her clutch goal.

And the weather?

"You get warm when you give it your all," claimed Diebold, who wore soccer shorts like all the other players. "It was really windy, but the whole team kept up the pressure the whole game. We were able to keep attacking."

Actually, the Saints kept attacking in the second half with the 20 mph wind at their backs. They stayed back for much of the first half, by design, when they were heading into the blustery conditions.

"It was definitely difficult in these conditions," said Xavier Coach Chris Higgins. "That's why we went against the wind in the first half, to get it out of the way.

"We played it tactically smart in that sense," he said. "We were lucky one of them counted and we won."

The Saints wanted to be more aggressive in the second half after battling Prairie to a scoreless draw in the first 40 minutes.

"That was the plan," said Higgins. "The plan was to set and defend in the first half, and then take advantage of the wind and the conditions in the second half. We were more aggressive."

Paige Loney made a couple of nice saves and pitched a shutout in goal for Xavier, which is ranked No. 5 in Class 2A with a 3-1 record.

Higgins, a native of Scotland, is also an assistant women's soccer coach at Mount Mercy University. This is his first year as the head coach at Xavier, which has a rich tradition in girls soccer.

"I'm excited to be here," he said. "I know the pressure that comes with Xavier and winning and competing. That makes me hungry as a coach. And the girls are hungry.

"It's been a process," he said. "A new coach and a new style of play. The coaches are getting used to the players, the players are getting used to the coaches."

Prairie fell to 2-3 with the loss.