

Ephrata shocks Conestoga in first round of states

WEST GOSHEN >> Just prior to the start of Tuesday's PIAA 4A Girls' Soccer first round playoff match, the rain had stopped but then the fog rolled in like a cheesy scary movie.

And what happened after that for Conestoga was straight out of a horror flick.

"That's a good way to put it," said Pioneers head coach Ben Wilson.

Just three days after the euphoria of capturing the District 1 championship, the Pioneers dropped a frightful 2-1 decision to Ephrata, the third seed from District 3. Conestoga's season, that also included a Central League crown, is suddenly over at 19-2-2 overall.

"We took some good steps forward this year," Wilson said. "The big emphasis was on performing in games that matter. It looked like we were doing that through districts where we marched right through against some really good teams.

"I guess we kind of ran out of steam. Maybe having gone through all those district games might have been part of it."

It wasn't that 'Stoga was knocked out in the first round, but more about how it happened. The Pioneers had a 1-0 lead and then in the span of seven minutes surrendered a goal on a questionable penalty kick, followed by a very soft goal on what appeared to be a routine play.

"In soccer, if you don't take your chances early and you don't control the game, then it can get away from you," Wilson said. "That's what happened (Tuesday) night."

Wilson declined to allow any of his players to be interviewed,

and initially balked at commenting himself. But it was understandable as 'Stoga's first loss since Sept. 4th came against an upstart opponent that couldn't get out of the quarterfinals of the Lancaster-Lebanon League Playoffs.

"Our girls have been resilient lately," said Ephrata head coach Wes Deininger. "We dug out a win in the third place game District 3, and I think some of that energy really carried over. This is a great win for us because District 1 is traditionally as strong as anyone.

"It was a tightly-played match. I thought we did a good job of neutralizing some of the things (Conestoga) wanted to do. And if you don't give up a lot of goals, you always have a chance."

Despite the spooky conditions, the Pioneers scored on their first shot on goal. Just 12 minutes in, senior Nia Scott corralled a header from teammate Emily Wertz, settled the ball, spun and booted it into the back of the net.

But about four minutes later, the Mountaineers (20-2-1 overall) were awarded a penalty kick that seemed to surprise just about everybody. Ephrata's Madison Root tied it up with a low shot just inside the far post.

"To be honest, on the penalty kick, I was so surprised it was even given," Wilson acknowledged. "I questioned if it was even a penalty. There was no explanation from the refs, and there was no hand-ball. The refs closest to me didn't even seem to know what was happening.

"But in soccer it happens. And it was our fault for not taking our chances when we had them."

And then things got worse at the 17:27 mark when Ephrata's Kristen Homan was awarded a lengthy free kick. And even though the shot was right at 'Stoga keeper Sarah Nselel, but the eye-level shot simply bounced off her hands and into the goal. And

