

Germantown Academy deflects its way past Hill School, into PAISAA final

WHITEMARSH >> Germantown Academy knew what to work on heading into their PAISAA semifinal matchup with the Hill School.

The Patriots wanted to get penalty corners and redirect balls inside the circle.

They scored three times on corners – all tipped at the last second – to advance past Hill, 3-1, Wednesday afternoon at Oberkircher Field on the campus of Germantown Academy.

Captain Sammy Popper assisted all three goals.

“We actually did (work on deflections) yesterday, which is funny,” Popper said. “We did a lot of tipping stuff yesterday, but normally we don’t really work on it that much. One of our philosophies is never giving up in the circle. One of our coaches says, ‘Fire in the belly’ in the circle, kind of like whatever is in front of the goal, we just make sure it gets in the goal.”



Germantown Academy players celebrate after scoring in the second half of their PAISAA semifinal against The Hill School on Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2018. (Gene Walsh/Digital First Media)

The first came just 104 seconds into the game. The Patriots earned a penalty corner – their third in the first two minutes of the game – and Sophie Towne sent the insert pass to Popper. Popper took a shot towards to close side of the goal, where Towne had re-entered the field. Towne got a piece of the shot and redirected it into the back of the cage for a 1-0 lead.

With the score tied at one early in the second half, Popper and Towne were at it again. This time, after receiving Towne's insert pass, Popper dribbled to the middle of the circle and lifted the ball. Towne reached her stick over her head to get a piece of it and guided it into the goal.

“Especially against a team with a strong goalkeeper we’re always looking for those easy tip-in goals,” GA coach Jackie Connard said. “We’ve been emphasizing that a lot this season.”

The Patriots added an insurance goal less than four minutes later. Towne's insert pass went to Popper, who dribbled left and hit a backhand shot towards the goal. Cat McFadden was in front and was able to get her stick on it to beat the goalie and give GA a 3-1 lead that would hold up as the final score.

"Three of our four goals last time we played were on corners," Connard said, referencing a 4-2 GA win last week. "That was the plan today – to try to get as many corners as we could and capitalize once we got them. Again today all three of our goals were corners."



The Hill School's Logan Clouser collides with Germantown Academy's Cat McFadden while going for the ball during their

PAISAA semifinal on Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2018. (Gene Walsh/Digital First Media)

“They have one of the most skilled and talented players who we play all season,” Hill coach Jen Weissbach said, referring to Popper. “She does a great job of creating her own shot and it’s hard and it’s fast and it’s accurate. Props to them. She does a great job taking those shots, but I’m proud of our ‘D.’ I think our ‘D’ did a nice job shutting most of them down. We just couldn’t capitalize on our opportunities. That’s what it came down to.”

The Blues best chance to cut into their two-goal deficit came with less than 10 minutes remaining. Popper was off the field for tripping and the Patriots were playing short-handed for five minutes. Hill sent a pass to the far post that looked to be an easy goal, but GA defender Grace Pacitti was there to keep her stick low and muscle the ball out of the circle.

“Coming back to full strength after being down a player is definitely a momentum boost,” Connard said. “When we’re down a man we pull a forward back. Then as soon as we can get back to full strength up front it’s good momentum.”

Hill tied the game at one with seven minutes left in the first half. Logan Clouser dribbled to the right side of GA’s cage and lifted a shot over the sliding goalie into the back of the net.



Germantown Academy's Sammy Popper prepares to send the ball forward during the Patriots' PAISAA semifinal against The Hill School on Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2018. (Gene Walsh/Digital First Media)

GA will face Penn Charter in Inter-Ac League play Saturday before facing Episcopal Academy in the PAISAA championship Tuesday.

"If we win (Saturday) we win our league," Connard said, "which hasn't happened in I think 12 years, so that will be a good one for us."

The loss brings an end to Hill's season.

"Incredibly proud of the girls," Weissbach said. "Our girls work hard every single day and they continued to get better all season. I think we finished with more wins than last year, fewer losses than last year and overall our future I think is

really bright. We have the majority of our team – about half of our team – is sophomores. While we're thankful for all of the seniors and what they did for us, I think our future is bright with the young talent that we have.”