



History repeats for state champion Saint Viator

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The Saint Viator boys' soccer team celebrates after its 1-0 victory over Peoria Notre Dame.

The story of Saint Viator's boys soccer season had a golden ending.

The Lions lifted the Class 2A state championship cup Saturday afternoon at North Central College in Naperville after defeating top-rated Peoria Notre Dame 1-0 to win the program's second state title.

Saint Viator's prior state triumph came in 2003, when the Lions defeated Peoria Notre Dame in the semifinals before defeating Carbondale 1-0 for the title.

This year's squad was a team of many individual talents, such as Trevor Wheeler, Kevin Cavers, Alan Aboona, Billy Hamilton and Brendan King.

Among the others who stepped forward on this memorable day in program history were Scott Faul, who was brilliant in goal for the Lions.

"The similarity between the 2003 club and this one was amazing, beginning with the start of our day today," said Taylor, who now has 446 wins his storied career as a head coach. "In 2003, we walked up and watched a late goal send the third-place match into OT, just as it happened today (between Freeport and Triad). And on that day we also scored an early goal (by Ray Krawzak) and it held up to give us our championship against Carbondale.

"That, and we have a couple of boys from this team that had older brothers playing for me in 2003, and the whole thing about the kids dying their hair blond ... and it all added up to me being so proud of a great bunch of kids that came through in their biggest game of their high school career to win a state title."

Billy Hamilton stunned the Irish (23-3-1) and a big crowd when he found the upper right corner on a free kick from 35 yards at just three minutes to give the Lions (24-4-1) the lead for good.

"No way did I think that goal would hold up," smiled Hamilton, who, once again, along with Wheeler and Cavers, dominated the center of the park. Their efforts made Peoria Notre Dame's dynamic striker Vince Ciciarelli (26 goals) basically a non-factor.

"Brendan was amazing in the back for us today," said Faul.

"King, Joe Surdam and Nick Abel were huge in the back today," said Wheeler, "and I can tell you as the match wore on, (Ciciarelli) became more and more frustrated, and would be looking for a foul, or just mumbling to himself. When I saw that, I knew we'd gotten into his head and it would help neutralize the biggest weapon in their attack."

The Irish could muster only limited scoring opportunities. And when they did, Faul denied them with a trio of superlative saves.

The first came when a well-designed free kick came from Cody Gilfillan at the edge and crashed through the Lions' wall toward an empty spot at the near post. Faul reacted quickly enough to extend fully to his right to save what seemed a sure goal, allowing the Lions to enter the break ahead 1-0.

"You've got to give the Saint Viator keeper a lot of credit, because in the biggest match of the year, he made a couple of huge saves for them when they needed them," said Irish captain Michael Schrader.

Taylor and many of his players thought the run of play belonged to the Lions for the first 40 minutes. In the second half, though, Taylor sensed his club was struggling going forward as tired legs and the need to defend caused the attack to sputter.

The Lions did manage a few chances in the PND end after the break, the first coming when a Jack Horvath serve from the right side was pulled firmly out the air by keeper Jon Andersh; the second when a blast from Cavers in close went wide after a superb pass from Aboona.

But Faul turned out to be the difference-maker in the second half, and the junior's save on a wicked blast from Jeff Cassidy at 57 minutes might have been the death knell for Peoria Notre Dame's attempt at a second straight state title.

Wheeler took nearly two minutes off the clock with a trio of nifty moves near the flag, and time finally ran out on the Irish.

"This title feels even more amazing than imaginable," said Wheeler.