

Unbeaten AQ boys take state crown

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ONEONTA — When Keith Manscuk netted his second goal of the day, he didn't do the customary fist-pumping and jumping in glee. Rather, the star senior forward simply stood still, seemingly in awe of his team's now-certain accomplishments — a state championship and, with it, an undefeated season.

Manscuk's goal was Aquinas Institute's fourth of the afternoon, putting an exclamation point on AQ's 4-0 win over Syracuse Westhill in the state Class B boys' soccer final Nov. 16. A few moments later the Little Irish were engaging in a tearful, joyous celebration.

"I'm going to cry, too," exclaimed Joe LaPietra, AQ's head coach, in the post-game huddle.

Senior forward Jayme Nowicki explained that emotions were running high because the season-long pressure to excel had finally been released.

"To get through it all and come out on top ... we've had such high expectations put on us, and when you have to face it every day it's difficult," a red-eyed Nowicki said.

The Little Irish lived up to those expectations at every turn, posting a final record of 22-0-2 and outscoring opponents by an incredible 104-5 margin in earning their second state crown in four years. And if the Little Irish felt any pressure in the title game at the National Soccer Hall of Fame complex, they certainly didn't show it.

"We came to play," Manscuk said. "We've had a great year and we knew we had a great team."

The Irish held a 1-0 halftime lead over Westhill thanks to junior midfielder Stephen Fantuzzo's goal midway through the first half. Then, continuing the trend that has marked AQ's post-season success over the past month, the Irish dominated after halftime.



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

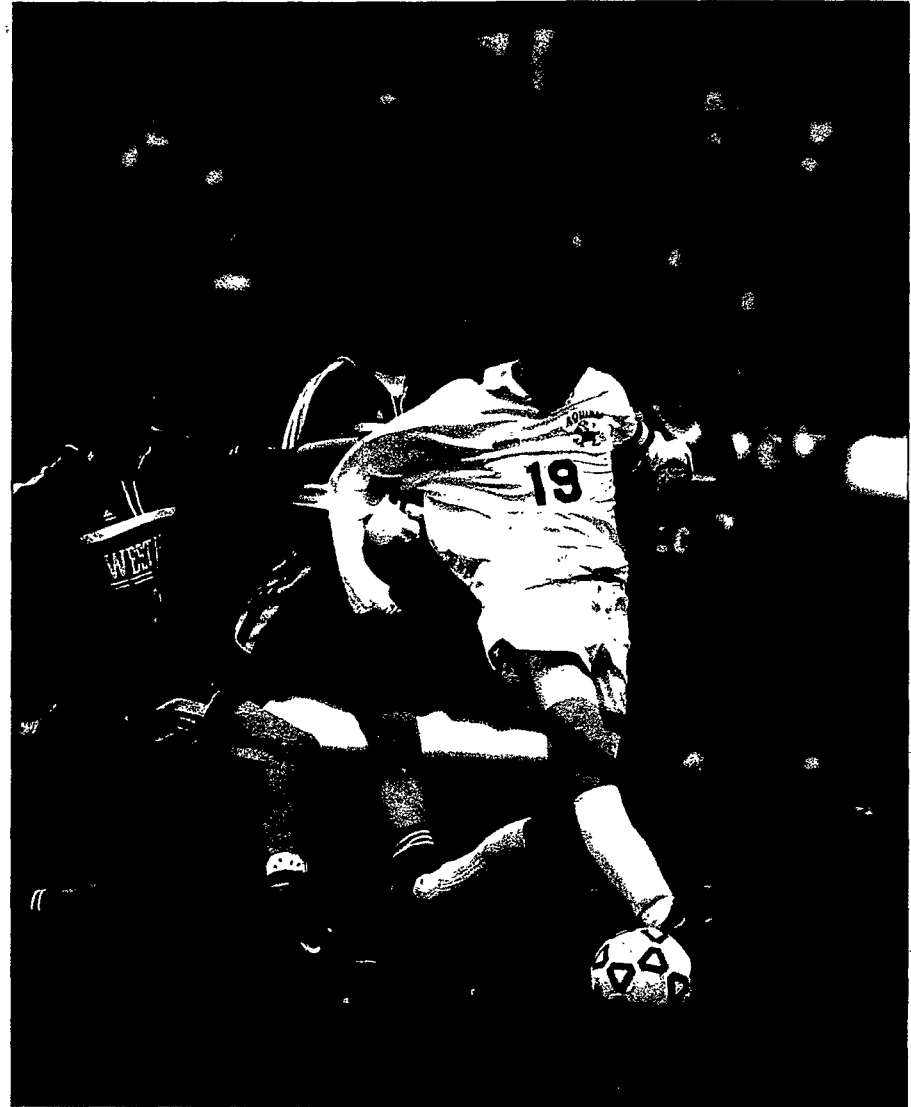
Joe Pettinari (left) and his twin brother Dominic (right) hug backup goalkeeper Pat Nichols after Aquinas' 4-0 win over Syracuse Westhill for the state Class B boys' soccer state championship. The game was held Nov. 16 at the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta.

Manscuk made it 2-0 five minutes into the second half, then senior midfielder Frank Iacovangelo added a third goal seven minutes later. Manscuk closed out the scoring with less than seven minutes to play. Senior goalie Jack Burgasser picked up the shutout as the Irish dominated the Warriors 16-3 in shots on goal for their 20th shutout of the season.

LaPietra credited AQ's superior physical shape for its dominance in many games' later stages. "We're the best-conditioned team in the state, hands down. If people say running and conditioning isn't important, they don't know soccer," he stated.

Yet the Irish needed all the skill and conditioning they could muster just to make it to the title game. In the Nov. 15 semifinal, also played at the National Soccer Hall of Fame, AQ earned a 3-2 win over Jericho of Section 8. Fantuzzo got a first-half goal and Manscuk scored twice in the second half, the latter goal breaking a 2-2 tie with 11:25 remaining.

Aquinas had earned its way to the state semifinals by winning its fourth consecutive Section 5 Class BB championship, then defeating



Aquinas' Keith Manscuk, a senior forward, gets through the defense of Westhill's Mike Rogus (left) to score the fourth and final goal in the Little Irish's 4-0 state-championship win.

Mynderse Academy and Grand Island in state play. Manscuk's four goals in the state Final Four gave him 38 for the season — an average of more than 1.5 per game.

Manscuk and Nowicki said the state championship was especially sweet following a painful 1-0 loss to Iroquois in the state quarterfinals last year. LaPietra added that al-

though his team never talked about going undefeated, the Irish were often fiercely challenged by upset-minded opponents.

"We knew we had to play at a high level all season. We had a bulls-eye on our backs all year and there was never any pressure on the other team, it was always on us. But we pulled through," LaPietra said.

Elmira Notre Dame girls earn first state title

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

WEBSTER — Jaek Frost was no match for Natalie Frost.

Having never been to the state girls' soccer Final Four, Elmira Notre Dame found the frigid mid-November conditions a bit foreign. But the Crusaders adjusted marvelously — and walked away with a championship as a result.

Frost (Natalie, that is) scored just 3 minutes, 6 seconds into the state Class C title game. Marissa Ruda

added a second-half goal, as ND won 2-0 over Mattituck of Section 11 on Nov. 15 at the Webster Sports Complex near Rochester. It marked the first-ever state championship for Notre Dame girls' soccer.

"We've waited a long time," shouted head coach Steve Weber amid his team's exuberant post-game mob.

Notre Dame struck quickly as Frost took a centering pass from senior forward Christine Farmer, spun, and planted from 15 yards away a perfect shot that floated over leap-

ing Mattituck goalie Marisa Viola and just under the crossbar.

"I got a good shot off. We jumped on them early," said Frost, noting the importance of getting the upper hand on Mattituck, a Long Island squad that had only allowed three goals all season before facing Notre Dame. That goal was the 28th this year to go with 12 assists for the speedy Frost, a senior forward.

ND took further control with 26:39 left in the game when Ruda, a junior midfielder/forward, took another

Farmer pass and flicked the ball past Viola from short range.

Mattituck, the state's top-ranked Class C team, was stunned not only by ND's offense but also the net-minding excellence of Luisa Lucero. The senior cleanly handled corner kicks and aggressively challenged potential breakaways; she flicked one first-half attempt by the Tuckers' Nicole Diffley off the top of her fingertips and away from the goal at the last split-second. Lucero finished

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