

Hartford blanks Otter Valley

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Otter Valley's Emily Peduto and Hartford's Nora Knudsen battle for possession during Wednesday's game at Markowski Field.

Adam Aucoin / Staff Photo



Hartford's Sophie Howe kicks the ball away from Otter Valley's Ella Brytowski (17) during Wednesday's game at Markowski Field.

Adam Aucoin / Staff Photo

BRANDON — The early stretch of the Hartford girls soccer team's schedule was a gauntlet. With defending Division II champion U-32 and teams like Fair Haven and Woodstock on the docket, the Hurricanes were tested at every turn.

Wins were hard to come by during that stretch, but playing those elite teams made them all the better. That showed in Wednesday's 2-0 win against Otter Valley at Markowski Field.

The Hurricanes had a dominant effort against the young Otters, controlling possession for most of the game.

"We set the goal to try and play the game in (Otter Valley's) third," said Hartford coach Jeff Acker, in his 16th year at the helm of the Canes.

"We wanted to keep them under pressure and not let them out of their end easy. That just creates chances. We had a ton of corners."

From the opening kick, the Hurricanes were putting pressure on the Otter backs.

Hartford struck early with a goal with 34:56 to play in the first half. The Hurricanes got a corner kick and set a strong ball into the box. Hartford got a boot on it and the Otters stopped it, but a rebound opportunity was left on the far side. Hartford captain Nora Knudsen was there to clean it up and put the Canes ahead.

The shots just kept on coming. Within the first 11 minutes, Hartford had taken 10 shots and it was more of that all game long.

Otter Valley keeper Linnea Faulkner came up big in keeping the deficit to one in the early stages given the load of shots coming at her. For the day, Faulkner had 15 saves.

“Linnea did a great job in the goal,” said second-year OV coach Tammi Blanchard. “We’re lucky to have her.”

“Their goalie played really well,” Acker said. “She had several big saves.”

Faulkner made a really nice save with less than 10 minutes to play in the first half, coming off her line to thwart a dangerous ball for the Hurricanes.

Hartford struck for its second and final goal in the early stages of the second half. Once again off a corner kick, the Canes got the ball in the box and Jenna Jasmin took a shot ticketed for the left side of the net. Faulkner got her gloves on it, but it trickled in.

“We work on looking for that second goal, that knock down ball off a corner,” Acker said. “The first one goes into the mixer and very rarely does that get powered in at this level. You have to be active, on your toes and get that second ball.”

Hartford outshot the Otters 32-6.

“It would have been nice to finish a few more, but it’s soccer,” Acker said. “That’s why (Lionel) Messi makes hundreds of millions of dollars.”

Otter Valley got a late flurry of chances. Elena Politano put a nice shot on goal in the closing minutes, but it went just left. They had a few more shots during that stretch that put some pressure on the Canes’ backs.

The Otters are still trying to break through for their first goal since their opening day loss to Proctor when Mallee Richardson scored.

Otter Valley has been hampered by injuries recently so Blanchard has been relying on a short bench. The effort is there, but she knows a positive result would boost some Otter confidence.

“We’re starting to play as a team,” Blanchard said. “These girls are going 80 minutes with all their heart. We have to get the ball in the net. Once we do that, things will move forward a whole lot better.”

Otter Valley (0-5) hosts Mount St. Joseph Saturday morning for the Otters’ Homecoming game.