

Gritty OV takes GM into overtime

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BRANDON — Ben Munukka had the overtime goal in Green Mountain's 1-0 victory over Otter Valley on Friday and official Randy Dewey had the line of the day.

When Otter Valley senior goalie/captain Hayden Bernhardt met with the officials before the overtime stanza, Dewey said to him, "This is all your fault, you know."

Bernhardt made one incredible save after another.

Green Mountain coach Jake Walker, a former goalie, had to marvel at the performance.

"Their goalie made some amazing saves," Walker said.

Otter Valley coach Dick Williams concocted the perfect game plan to give his team a chance against the heavily favored Chieftains. The Otters packed the defense in, having nine defenders between the ball and the goal when the Chiefs were attacking.

He also had one player poised for a breakaway, often Elijah Tucker-Bryant.

Several times, the Otters nearly got that break-away to get on top.

But the only goal of the day came with 6:48 remaining in the first 10-minute OT stanza. Everett Mosher slid the ball to Munukka who found the small space between Bernhardt and the post to give the Chieftains a joyous ride back to Chester with a 5-1 record.

"I used my strong (right) foot. It was not a comfortable shot but I had to do what I had to work with," Munukka said.

Most of the game was played in Green Mountain's offensive end as the Chieftains unloaded 39 shots.

Liam O'Brien tested Bernhardt in the early minutes of the game but the keeper made a spectacular diving save. It was a scene that the would become all too familiar to the Chieftains.

Twelve minutes into the game, GM's prolific scorer Everett Mosher nailed the post.

Then Bernhardt made another highlight-reel save on O'Brien.

It came to be that the sensational save by the OV keeper was expected.

He also had some solid help defensively. Owen Thomas and Drew Pelkey had some clears under the heavy pressure.

Many of Bernhardt's saves required cat-quick reflexes because they came on shots from point-blank range.

The Chiefs kept attacking right through the final seconds of the first half but in those waning seconds, Fraser Pierpont made a saving clear.

It was more of the same in the second half. The game plan was working just as it had been drawn up.

Four minutes into the new half, the Otters had one of their best chances for that breakaway that they wanted when Luca Cifone and Tucker-Bryant combined for a run that was one of OV's biggest scoring threats of the day.

Midway through the second half, Tucker-Bryant had another dangerous looking break-away but again GM keeper Evan Hayes and his defense was able to escape.

Elias Stowell-Aleman, Everett and his brother Eben Mosher, O'Brien. Munukka and Austin Kubisek all had strong scoring bids.

But if the shot did not sail wide, Bernhardt was there to deter it.

Nobody could fin the goal except Munukka and he needed extra time to do it.

"You get frustrated by that but our players did not let the frustration overtake them," Walker said. "And they found a way to win."

"They are clearly the best team in Division III," said Williams of the Chieftains before reconsidering and throwing Peoples Academy and Winooski into the pot with them.

Everett Mosher is a special player on course for a 100-goal career this senior year. Williams had a great deal of praise for Pelkey who was assigned to mark Mosher.

"Drew was the reason he did not score," Williams said.

"Owen Thomas was also great at putting pressure on the ball and Max Derby did a great job.

“This is a gritty bunch of boys.”

The Otters fall to 1-3-2.

It was Green Mountain’s fourth consecutive shutout.

The Chieftains’ respect for Bernhardt was evident as they came up to him, one after another, to congratulate him after the game.

Otter Valley had seen a very special GM team that has a chance to get to a third consecutive state title game.

And the Chieftains saw something very special in Otter Valley. Dick Williams calls it grit.