

# Shootout superstars win two instant classics

## Lakeland girls' soccer advances to state for first time in 18 years

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It has been a dream season thus far for the Lakeland girls' soccer team. A home win vs. a rival and a sectional championship punched the Thunderbirds' ticket to the state tournament.

The Thunderbirds defeated two-seeded Ashland 2-2 (4-3 PK's) Thursday night in a WIAA Division 3 sectional semifinal. On Saturday in Arcadia, the Thunderbirds beat top-seeded Rice Lake 2-2 (4-2 PK's) to advance to state for the first time since 2004.

"All I can think about is we did it. This has been a goal since our freshman year," senior Leah Wolfe said.

"We've been working towards it. We haven't gotten past semi-sectionals. That accomplishment and then being able to take it one step further (is amazing)."

"You can't really put it into words. It's just a strong emotion, just pure joy at the highest level," senior Sophia Myshchyshyn said. "It has been a dream since the beginning and we have achieved it through hard work and practice and putting in extra and the fact that it was the second game where we went all the way to PK's and we were able to perform under pressure. It really shows just the strength of the team."

"The girls left everything on the field this last game. I

told them to keep digging deep. It all came down to the battle and who wanted it. It is unreal how hard these ladies worked to make it happen," coach Stephanie Hartzheim said. "We are so unbelievably proud of these ladies. The excitement on the field last night after we won in PK's was one we will never forget."

### Ashland

"I think what it means is it shows all the progress that we've had as a team," senior Olivia Melka said about the win. "We've been able to work together on and off the field to produce high quality soccer and we've just come together to do our best."

An absolute thriller, the Thunderbirds showed resiliency and grit, finding a way to win the biggest game of the year. They did so in front of the home crowd in dramatic fashion.

"This was one of the most exciting and stressful games of this year," junior Maria Gironella said. "It feels so good to come off with a win tonight because I know we worked so hard to get here."

Both teams were feeling each other out early on. Lakeland's best look early came on a corner kick, but they were unable to find an opening to shoot.

Naomi Hamerla had a huge game in the net for the Thunderbirds. One of the best saves all night came on a close range direct kick where she leaped and swatted it out.

"Last night's game was challenging and made the girls dig deep," Hartzheim said. "If you wanted to see a good game that kept you on



PHOTOS BY BRETT LABORE/LAKELAND TIMES

The Thunderbirds storm the field in pure joy after Ashland missed their final penalty kick of the shootout during a sectional semifinal game against Ashland Thursday, June 9 at IncredibleBank Field in Minocqua. The win advanced them to the sectional final against Rice Lake.



Sophia Myshchyshyn puts the Thunderbirds up 2-0 with a goal in the second half during a WIAA Division 3 sectional final game against Rice Lake Saturday, June 11 at Cashen Field in Arcadia.



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Olivia Melka, right, and Leah Wolfe hug after Melka's go-ahead goal in the second half during a sectional semifinal game against Ashland Thursday, June 9 at IncredibleBank Field in Minocqua.

the edge of your seat, last night was that game."

It was a 0-0 game at 20:50.

The Oredockers struck first at 23:26. Sienna Mika made a run to the net, forcing Hamerla to come up and make a play. After some contact, Mika got it by Hamerla and scored it from close range.

Lakeland had a quick answer that gave them a jolt.

Josie Wentland had a look in the box, shooting it far side and over the head of Ashland goalie Maggie Tutor for the tying goal at 24:08.

"That really just gave us energy and hope and it motivated us to keep going," Gironella said.

Two goals were scored in 42 seconds. The game was tied at 1-1.

The Thunderbirds seized the momentum. Olivia Melka made a pass to Myshchyshyn who took a shot, shooting it high and over the net.

Lakeland kept the pressure up with another shot by Myshchyshyn. Tutor made a diving stop that led to a Lakeland corner kick. On that corner kick, Wolfe took a shot, deflected out of bounds.

Ashland star player Hailee Wilson received a yellow card late in the first half. It

led to a Myshchyshyn direct kick, saved by Tutor.

It was a 1-1 game at the half.

The Lakeland defense came up big time and time again. One thing that helped with that was the play of Gironella, who defended Wilson all game.

"Today I was tasked with man-marking their top player, and I was just supposed to not let her turn, prevent her from doing anything, and it helped the defense so they had one less thing to worry about," Gironella said.

In the second half, Taylor Heleniak had a chance at a goal early on. She received a pass from Melka, but was thwarted by Ashland's defense before getting a good shot off.

Hamerla kept making big saves. Ashland looked to have a breakaway goal attempt until Hamerla came in to make a sliding save.

"Naomi had some great saves and the defense had some game changing clears," Hartzheim said.

Melka had one of the shots of the year at 67:30. Taking a shot from outside the box, she arced it right over the head of Tutor and into the back of the

net.

"At halftime coach told me to take more shots and I saw the opportunity even though I was far out and I took it and it went in the top corner," Melka said.

The go-ahead goal gave the Thunderbirds a 2-1 lead.

Myshchyshyn nearly put the game away at 77:40. She had some space in front of the net and took a shot. It went high, keeping the game at 2-1.

Coming down to the final minute, it looked as if the Thunderbirds were going to win in regulation. A penalty gave Wilson a direct kick. She took advantage with a perfectly placed shot, scoring the equalizing goal with just 51 seconds left in the game.

The game would go to two 10-minute overtime periods.

Even though the Oredockers had shocked Lakeland, the Thunderbirds kept battling in overtime.

"We knew that we still had play in us," Melka said. "We knew that we could still do it and we just had to fight to make it happen."

The Thunderbirds had an injury scare when Wentland went down during the second