

Team Captain, Taylor Smith, Leads NSU University School's Soccer Team to the State Championship

Team Captain, Taylor Smith, and the University School Sharks soccer team reached the state championship for the first time in school history.

CORAL SPRINGS, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, March 13, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Team Captain, [Taylor Smith](#), and the University School Sharks soccer team continued their storybook season to reach the state championship for the first time in school history. Freshman and team captain, Taylor Smith, scored in the 74th minute to tie the game and sophomore goalkeeper Avril Ramirez stepped up with a memorable performance as the Sharks advanced on penalty kicks and stunned host Benjamin 2-1 (4-3) in a Class 3A state semifinal Friday night. University School (15-3-3) will play Montverde Academy on Wednesday at 4 p.m. at Spec Martin Stadium in DeLand. University School had never won a regional playoff game entering the season. The Sharks lost to Benjamin 8-0 last year and also just finished the season with a 5-9-2 record.

Coach Diego Estremadoyro, who is in his sixth season, was proud of his team's turnaround and accomplishment. "It's a testament to the players," he said. "It's about



Taylor Smith and her teammates



Team Captain Taylor Ava Smith

getting good players who are committed and do everything they can to help the program. We have a very young team. The results are showing now and it's great for the school."

Benjamin (15-1-1), which reached the state final for the first time last season, had entered the final four without a loss. They had registered 14 shutouts and outscored opponents 59-3. The Bucs were ranked No. 2 in Class 3A, No. 3 in Florida and No. 4 nationally by MaxPreps. University School trailed 1-0 before Taylor Smith stepped up with a free kick outside the box as she launched a high arching ball down the middle and into the net over the leaping sophomore goalkeeper Emily Simon in the 74th minute. "We had complete confidence that we were going to win," Taylor Smith said.

"It means a lot. It's very rare that this ever happens. I am very grateful."



Taylor Smith is also interested in fashion

The two were scoreless during two 10-minute overtime sessions. Ramirez stepped up for the Sharks with the first save of the penalty kick session, and Simon responded with a save for the Bucs. Junior Lily White, freshman Sophia Balistreri and sophomore Sam Woods all scored for the Bucs while freshman Bianca Raskin, sophomore Giana Sanchez and freshman McKenna Wickman all answered back for the Sharks.

Ramirez moved to her left and deflected the ball toward the goalpost for a critical save on the Bucs' fifth attempt.

Ramirez lifted her team in the Sharks' first game that went to penalty kicks this season. "We have been working hard on penalty kicks [in practice], and we pulled through," Ramirez said. "I had to go for it, and I made it happen and it felt wonderful. It feels so good and we have worked very hard."

Junior Reese Sobol fired a ball into the top left corner of the net for the game-winning goal in the penalty kick session for the Sharks. "We came out flat in the first half and the girls were nervous," Estremadoyro said. "We started to get into the groove in the second half, and it all changed once we scored. The girls played a lot of minutes and they did not quit and they were still battling."

The Bucs controlled possession and dictated the attack throughout the first half. Balistreri found a loose ball in the middle of the field and fired a shot from outside the box into the top left corner of the net in the 27th minute to make it 1-0. The Bucs had several scoring chances

throughout the contest, but failed to capitalize.

Balistreri missed a shot in the box wide to the right of the net in the 71st minute. White missed on a shot wide of the net as well in the 78th minute. Balistreri sent a ball toward the net in the 89th minute, but Ramirez denied the attempt to preserve the tie. Ramirez also made multiple saves in the first and second overtime periods.

“It was not our best day,” Benjamin coach Hillary Carney said. “We were just unable to finish the opportunities that were there. We fell short and it’s hard, but hopefully we learn from it. We are a young team. It’s a growth opportunity and with our personnel, we should be back here again. We will have to respond next year.” Benjamin had reached the state final for the first time in school history last season before a 2-1 loss against Lakeland Christian.

University School enters the state final on an eight-game winning streak, and they’re unbeaten in the past 10 games.

About [Taylor Ava Smith](#), Athlete and Model

Taylor Ava Smith (15) was born in South Florida to entrepreneurial parents. Their influence can be seen in the drive that she has, her sportsmanship, and her forward-thinking perspective when it comes to business relationships and content creation. Taylor’s career building began the first time she set foot on the field. She described a pure passion for the game of soccer, and it is seen in her play—just as in any other artform.

With aspirations of attending a top-tier university and continuing her soccer goals, Taylor works as hard academically as she does on the field. She is currently playing on a team that ranks in the top 5 within the United States, and she is on the field every day to perfect her craft.

As she has entered high school, Taylor’s main goals off the field have continued to be on her success in academics while generating a spotlight on her work within the fashion community—working with small to medium sized brands that align with her values.

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