

Messinger's heroics help No. 1 Aliso Niguel avoid a loss

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2010-01-07 20:29:22



MISION VIEJO - Eighth-ranked Capo Valley owned the possession game, the attacking game and thoroughly outshot the county's top-ranked team Thursday.

However, No. 1 Aliso Niguel is equipped with the best goalie in the county, and Kathleen Messinger was a barricade that couldn't be broken through. The standoff resulted in a scoreless tie, 0-0, in the teams' South Coast League opener at Capistrano Valley.

"That's life," Cougars coach Manny Romero said. "We were in their half the whole time. Kudos to their keeper. She kept them in the game. We had shot after shot after shot. We hit the crossbar three times. We just can't get the bounce."

Aliso Niguel had an early run and corner kick before Capo Valley's offense began creating opportunities. The first came on a header from Jordan Marada. Soon after,

Messinger made her first spectacular save that surely kept the Cougars off the scoreboard.

A Capo Valley cross was sent high into the box, and Messinger, an Aliso defender and Capo's Candice Uhl all jumped for the ball. All three hit the ground while the ball came free.

Uhl was the first up and she ran back toward the ball. Messinger stood up, and had a choice to make. Run back to goal, or charge to the top of the box and try to stop Uhl's kick. Messinger rushed out and as Uhl launched a hard kick, deftly deflected the shot with her left arm and the threat was cleared.

Later in the half Messinger had a similar play involving Jordan Marada. Again Messinger charged to the top of the box and managed to grab the ball as Marada was preparing for a shot.

Capo Valley earned a free kick in the second half and was denied once more by Messinger. Amanda Tafoya struck the ball sweetly, but Messinger sprung to her right and hit the turf and corralled the ball.

As strong as Messinger was, she got some help when the Cougars hit the post or crossbar on three occasions, but the ball never bounced into the net.

"They were great and we weren't that good and we still held it down for a 0-0 tie," Aliso Niguel coach Randy Dodge said. "Kathleen is the best keeper in the county."

Though a tie may look unattractive for the county's top-ranked team, gaining a point on the road in the South Coast League is all that mattered on a day the Wolverines struggled to generate any serious looks.

"We got a point on the road," Dodge said. "They let one slip. I'm proud of the kids to get a point. Points are points."

Capo Valley, which reached the semifinals of the prestigious Excalibur Tournament, wasn't discouraged by Thursday's events. In fact, the Cougars gained confidence in their performance.

"The girls know they did their job, it just wasn't meant to be," Romero said.

