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'World-class strike' lifts No. 4 Creighton soccer to rainy win over upset-minded UNO

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No. 4 Creighton soccer appeared headed for an easy win over UNO Tuesday night, leading by two goals less than 30 minutes into Tuesday night's match. The Mavericks hadn't beaten the Bluejays in more than five years.

Then, Omaha's Maguire Perkins hurtled toward an open net to score. Five minutes later, the game was tied after a goal by his brother Brett Perkins. And as the teams entered the second half, it was a new game at Caniglia Field.

So CU's eventual 4-2 win wasn't handed to them. It was hard-fought; the third goal came after 25 minutes of back-and-forth second-half play, off the foot of Ayden Kokoszka.

"I knew when I came in, I had to change the game, and that's my thought process: just get a goal for us to go ahead," Kokoszka said. "I was just looking for time and space on my feet, and I looked up, I saw the goalie, and I shot it."

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He looked over to his team as they came running toward him and piled onto him. They knew at that moment, the game had shifted.

“That was a world class strike. I think that's one of the best goals I've seen this season,” Creighton head coach Johnny Torres said. “He’s got such a tight control, right? He's got this uncanny ability to shift and get defenders out of balance.”

But the Bluejays also knew they needed to manage their emotions. They’d let excitement get the better of them in the first half, and they had to play carefully to make sure it didn’t happen again.

“We were up two-zero. They scored two goals,” Kokoszka said. “So our mentality: just stay strong defensively.”

On their end, Omaha was tired from keeping pace with their rivals for most of the game. After Kokoszka’s goal, Creighton had six throw-ins compared to only two from Omaha. A yellow card on the Mavs’ Mikey Stukenholtz led to a Jays free kick, which ultimately led to Creighton’s fourth goal, by Jordan Igwenma.

“It’s twofold. We lost our legs a little bit, and they brought in some fresh first line attackers,” Omaha head coach Donovan Dowling said. “And then, you know, we’ve got to be better in moments. I think we could have solved some of their goals and in a big environment like this, and a big match, it's little details and moments.”

The Bluejays (10-0-2) scored the first two goals of the game. The first was by Angel Lopez, assisted by Igwenma, a Creighton Prep graduate. Matthew Reed scored his ninth goal of the season, assisted by Kokoszka, to put the Jays up by two. Reed is tied for second in Division I for total goals.

“It's not easy to be able to get yourself out of that hole and come out and try and respond and try and make up for the mistakes that you've made,” Torres said. “So I’m really proud of the guys for coming out and once again making up for our pitfalls in the first half.”

As he headed out onto the pitch on Tuesday night, Kokoszka tried not to think too much about CU moving up to the No. 4 spot in the rankings. He set out to stay humble and help the team prove themselves through the way they play.

“I think confidence is the most important,” Kokoszka said. “I just believe in myself, and I’m able to do things like that goal.”

Creighton’s primary goalkeeper, Matthew Hudson, did not play Tuesday night after starting the past three games.

“He picked up a small knock against Marquette,” Torres said, “but he’s fine.”

The Mavs fell to 4-2-4.

Photos: Omaha men's soccer hosts Creighton