

West's Kelli Segobiano named 3A player of the year

BY DAVID WILHELM - News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE -- Senior sweeper and St. Louis Scott Gallagher player since she was 11, Kelli Segobiano was the rock on a defensive line that carried Belleville West to its best season in history.

Segobiano, a four-year starter, led the Maroons to a 19-4-1 record and a co-championship in the Southwestern Conference with Collinsville. West surrendered a conference-low 16 goals, also sharing that distinction with the Kahoks.

For her contributions, Segobiano has been recognized by coaches as the News-Democrat's Class 3A Player of the Year.

"I'm just really excited," said Segobiano, who had two goals and four assists. "It's such an honor to be getting this. There were so many great athletes in our conference and our class. I definitely put this up there with the all-state award.

"But I have to thank all the girls on the team. We wouldn't have been as successful without everyone."

West fell short of a state tournament appearance after a 2-1 loss to Normal in the championship game of the Normal Sectional. The Ironmen's winning goal came on a penalty kick in the second half following a controversial hand-ball call.

But there were plenty of highlights in the Maroons' season, including a strong performance in the prestigious Adidas Tournament of Champions in May in Burlington, Iowa, where they won two of three games, and a city championship that was clinched with a 1-0 victory over Althoff.

"We kind of felt this was our year," Segobiano said. "We were aiming higher and higher as the season went on. We set goals for ourselves and worked hard to get them. Especially with this being my senior year ... I wish I could have experienced (the state tournament). But it doesn't always work out how you want it. You have to move on and look back at all the positives you had."

As one of eight seniors for the Maroons, Segobiano remained cool under pressure and became noticeably more vocal this season. Much of that had to do with the position she played, but Segobiano also felt it was her responsibility as the team's most experienced player.

"I was the captain, and being a senior, I stepped it up in the leadership part," Segobiano said. "I was a go-to (person) for a lot of girls on our team. Being a senior, I knew all the freshmen were looking up to me, and the other girls were following my actions. I had to show them that if you give 110 percent, it pays off."

For as long as she can remember, Segobiano said a soccer ball has been within arm's reach. Her parents, Tony and Gina, are Granite City natives, and in Granite City, soccer was king when they grew up. Kelli Segobiano began playing at the tender age of 4.

"From what I remember, I always loved to play soccer," said Segobiano, who has a younger brother, Scott. "Soccer in my family is a big thing. Both my parents are from Granite City, which was the big powerhouse back then. We were always around a soccer environment. "Soccer is a great way to get your mind off everything else. When you play, it's like nothing else matters."

Tony Segobiano coached his daughter in her formative years, and has been the Maroons' assistant under Jason Mathenia the last four seasons.

Kelli Segobiano said she never has tired of having her dad as a coach.

"One cool thing I've been able to have is my dad," she said. "He's been my coach since I was 4. It's awesome having him there and be able to experience all this high-school stuff. We work well together, and it's been great having him help me.

"I've got to thank Coach Mathenia, too. He's helped me all four years. But my dad's definitely been a big part of this. A lot of people might not like having their dad as a coach, but I've never taken him for granted. He's really supportive, and he's always helping me." Segobiano, the valedictorian at West, had enough ability to earn an athletic scholarship and play soccer in college. But she has enrolled at the University of Illinois, where she will forego soccer to earn majors in math and secondary education.

"Yeah, it's definitely going to be hard because I enjoy playing it so much," Segobiano said. "Katelyn Hoffman (a goalie at Collinsville) is going to Illinois, too, so when I go watch them, I know I'm going to miss it."

Segobiano said there were "a lot of factors" in her decision to quit playing soccer.

"I had to weigh my options," she said. "I had to think about the commitment it takes and what I wanted my college experience to be like. "U of I is a tough school. I knew I had to get good grades (to go to Illinois). I wanted to get As. I don't want to settle for a C or something like that. Just like with athletics, I want to win. I don't want to settle for being mediocre."