

champion *Difficulties don't stop girls soccer team from winning state title* CHALLENGES

As Wando's centerback **Alyssa Graham**, 12, stepped in for a defensive play, she was suddenly shoved from behind. She collapsed to the ground.

Wando led 1-0 in the state championship game vs. J.L. Mann High School, but Graham would spend the rest of the game in the emergency room.

"When it first happened, I thought I was completely fine. I just planned on getting back up and scoring the play," Graham said. "But when I sat up I realized that I couldn't move my arm."

Graham said she was frantic and worried the fate of her and her team as she was being rushed to the hospital.

"I was just kinda freaking out, like 'Oh my God, what's going to happen,'" Graham said. "It was a lot of unknown for me."

Graham was in the emergency room for two hours. While there, she received game updates via text from friends in the spectator stands. Even with a game-ending injury, she was more concerned about her team than her broken collarbone.

"I had a lot of adrenaline going ... once I finally found out we won, that's when I started feeling all the pain from my collarbone," Graham said. "I didn't really feel it until I found out we won State."

Wando won 2-1 over the Patriots after a hard loss to the same team when Graham was a freshman. Graham began playing soccer for Wando on junior varsity when she was in 8th grade. She has been playing on varsity since she was a freshman.

"Winning and finally being able to take them off their three-year state streak and finally getting back on the board... it was a really, really great feeling."

Graham's teammates **Ashton** and **Ansley Douty**, 10, watched it all unfold.

"It was super hard seeing her have to get off the field because

she brings so much energy and talent to our team," Ashton said.

Ashton and Ansley have challenges of their own. They were both diagnosed with Type One Diabetes.

"It's just something else to manage. It's something I have to deal with, like everything I do," Ashton said.

However, they haven't let their diabetes stop them. They are careful before games, checking their blood sugar to make sure everything will go smoothly when they are on the field. But during the game, they don't let it hold them back.

"I'm locked into the game, not too concerned about it because I'm planning ahead of time," Ansley said.

Ashton and Ansley were freshmen when they won State, a rarity for someone at their age.

"It's a little bit intimidating but it was super exciting," Ansley said.

They work hard to prepare before games and State was no different. Drinking Gatorade and always monitoring their blood sugar is a part of their pregame routine along with a thorough warmup, and team traditions to hype themselves up.

"It's not as easy as just getting on the field," Ansley said, "I used to... take that for granted but I haven't let it stop me."

Winning State wasn't something they expected because of the losses they had gone through in previous years. Twice, the team fell to J.L. Mann in the state championship. In 2018, the team lost in the semi-finals to Lexington.

"We knew our team was very good all around but I don't think any of us really thought we would win it since it had been so long and it takes so much work," Ashton said.

Story by Gracie Sams

Designer Emma Schambach



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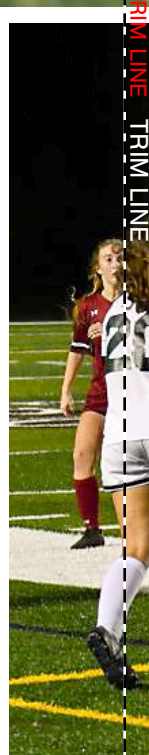
PASS AND PLAY: (right) Scanning the field, **Kendall Smith**, 11, tries to advance the ball. "I was feeling confident. I was dribbling the ball in the middle of the field, looking for one of my teammates out wide to pass the ball," Smith said; photo by s. cote

ALL ABOUT THE KICKS: (far right) Focusing on the ball, **Isabel Ribeiro**, 10, aims to score a goal. "My teammate passed me the ball and I was nervous I wouldn't make it, but I felt prepared," Ribeiro said; photo by s. cote



ALL OR NOTHING: (above) Hugging her teammate after one of the most challenging games of the season, **Taitum Maxwell**, 12, was overwhelmed with joy after winning state championship. "I'm not even kidding, it was the most amazing and surreal feeling in the world... It's something I will never forget for the rest of my life," Maxwell said; photo by a. mcloed

HEADS UP: (right) On the pitch, **Ashton Douty**, 10, heads the ball in order to win it out of the air. "I got to win the ball, in the air. I brought on a lot of energy and just jumped up and got it, and won the ball first," Douty said; photo by a. mcloed



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