

# AU MEN'S POSTSEASON HISTORY



## Ashland 2 at Mercyhurst 1 At SIU-Edwardsville 1, Ashland 0

For the first time in school history, the Ashland University men's soccer team made the trip to the NCAA Division II playoffs. This wasn't just a cameo appearance either. The Eagles threatened to be like the famed unwanted cousin – "Come to dinner, stay all winter."

In the first round of the playoffs, Ashland won at Mercyhurst, 2-1. That could be considered a monumental upset. The 'Hurst was one of the most experienced playoff teams in the country. Plus, this match was played on the Lakers' home field. Mercyhurst entered the match, 16-1-0, 6-0 in the

Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. The 'Hurst was ranked fifth in the country and since 1995 was 33-1-1 in GLIAC play.

None of that seemed to faze the Eagles. Ashland scored the first two goals of the match. Junior forward Brad Stinson scored at 37:15 and sophomore Kirk Harwat made it 2-0 with his 15th goal of the season just 1:17 later. Both goals were assisted by sophomore Marko Raduka and sophomore Ben Walker also got an assist on the first goal.

After that, the AU defense took over. The Lakers made several spirited runs at AU, but junior goalkeeper Bayard Elfvin and the rest of the Eagles were able to keep the 'Hurst at arm's length.

"I think the key was our team understanding the fact that it (success) wasn't just about talent," said AU head coach John Hall. "It took a squad, not a team, to accomplish things. People confuse that. It's not just about the 11 players on the field, it's everyone."

The victory also served notice that the Eagles could compete with anyone.

"It put us into an area where teams wouldn't take Ashland lightly," emphasized Hall. "In seasons past, they'd look at Ashland and say they have potential. We proved we could get this."

The Eagles almost got another win in the next round (quarterfinals) of the playoffs. Playing at SIU-Edwardsville, the Eagles lost, 1-0. The host Cougars got a goal by Justin McMillian (his 16th) at 63:18 and that sent them to the next round of the playoffs. The Cougars led in shots, 14-9. The win gave SIU-Edwardsville a 17-2-3 record. AU ended the year at 12-5-1.



## Ashland 1, Findlay 1 (2OT) At Gannon (Erie, PA)

What began as a NCAA Division II men's soccer playoff match turned into an Ironman competition as Ashland and Findlay battled each other and 50 mile-per-hour winds.

The teams were tied at the end of regulation play and through two overtime sessions. In the penalty kick phase, Findlay scored four times to advance. Ashland found the back of the net with two of its penalty kicks.

"At the end of 90 minutes and two overtimes, there were chances we should have taken," offered AU head coach John Hall. "We had chances, they had chances. It boiled down to penalty kicks. That's not a good way to end it, but that's the way it ended. It just wasn't meant to be."

This was AU's second trip in three seasons to the NCAA playoffs. The Oilers were in the postseason party for the first time. This was also the second match between the two clubs in a span of five days. The teams concluded the regular season in Ashland where Findlay won, 2-1.

In addition to the ever-present wind, the game was played on artificial turf.

"The wind was blowing straight down the field," reviewed Hall. "Both teams played differently because of the conditions. Both teams were OK with it.

"Being an artificial surface you get funny bounces, players aren't used to that," continued Hall. "On grass, whether it's a mudpile or whatever, the players can adapt easier."

The Oilers had the wind with them in the first half and peppered AU keeper Charles Curren with 13 shots. AU, just trying to survive, had five shots. The only Findlay shot to get past Curren came at 42:55, Clay Oley scoring his sixth goal of the year. There was no assist on the play.

The Eagles got the wind in the second half and that change paid off immediately. At 46:03, Mike Stoerkel scored his third goal of the season off a direct kick. AU had some other legitimate chances in the second half but couldn't get the ball behind UF keeper Chris Stewart a second time.

AU had a prime chance to score with 6:30 remaining in the second overtime session when Chris Bigelow broke free for a one-on-one opportunity against Stewart. Stewart barely got his hand on the ball and tipped it away. Findlay outshot the Eagles, 5-1 in the first overtime and AU led in shots, 3-1 in the second. For the game the Oilers had a 26-14 advantage in shots.

That left the shootout phase and Findlay put the game away on its fifth kick. Leading 3-2, Justin Fields drove the ball past Curren for the game winner.

"The hardest thing is getting here," recapped Hall. "We've been here two of the last three years. It's a great experience. We can take a lot of positives from this."