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Churchill's field hockey team believes, and now it's on to the Maryland 4A Final

By Varun Shankar

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Lizzie Baggett was running out of real estate. The smooth-dribbling senior midfielder from Churchill had gotten past most of the Whitman defense, but she didn't have a clear avenue to the goal.

She heard teammate Lexie Levitt shout, "Dogleg!" — the field hockey call for a pass backward. Baggett delivered the ball to the junior, who rocketed it to the goal mouth, where it was tipped in by Churchill's Morgan Stolker. The goal was the game-winner in Churchill's 2-1 victory in a Maryland 4A semifinal Tuesday night at Paint Branch High in Burtonsville.

Churchill advanced to face Severna Park in the state title game at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Washington College in Chestertown.

Baggett's pass was based on trust — confidence in her teammate to be in position to receive it and confidence in herself to deliver a blind feed accurately.

"I know they're such skilled players," Baggett said of her teammates. "So if Lexie calls for the ball, I will give the ball to Lexie every time because she's just such a smart player."

That's a belief Churchill (16-1) didn't always have. During a preseason practice, Coach Cay Miller had her players close their eyes, and she asked them to raise their hands if they believed in themselves. Her jaw dropped at what she saw.

"There was a lot of like half-raises," Miller said. "And we were shocked by some of the people who are leaders on our team who didn't even move their hand at all."

She then asked them to raise their hands if they believed in their teammates. That time, every hand went up.

"It's easy to beat yourself up over things but not forgive yourself for the same mistakes that any human can make," Miller said. "That's a huge hurdle that we've had to overcome this season."

Whitman (13-3) posed a unique threat, too, having handed Churchill its lone defeat. But the Bulldogs dominated much of Tuesday's game, racing to a 2-0 lead after Baggett's blind feed and Levitt's assist.

Whitman drew closer with a goal at the end of the third quarter. Miller could sense her players getting frazzled, so she asked them to take deep breaths.

It worked: The Bulldogs weathered the storm in the final period, even stopping a late Whitman penalty corner to advance.

“We made it so far ... with believing,” Baggett said. “I really believe that we can win the state championship because I trust my teammates so much.”

Severna Park awaits

Severna Park moved on to the 4A final with a 4-1 victory over Dulaney behind goals from Noel Stefancik, Bekah Mayron, Genevieve Mullervy and Ava Drexler-Amey.

Severna Park clinched its second consecutive trip to the final; it defeated Delaney in 2019 before last year’s postseason was canceled.

“Some of the girls that are on this team also played on that 2019 championship team,” Coach Shannon Garden said. “... So they remember how great it felt.”

In the Class 3A semifinals at Broadneck High, River Hill beat Westminster, 4-1, and Arundel topped Marriots Ridge, 3-2. River Hill and Arundel will meet for the title at 4 p.m. Saturday at Washington College.

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