

Legacy beats Jamestown for West Region boys soccer title

Sabers earn top seed in state tournament

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Bismarck Tribune

Legacy had to feel a bit of déjà vu when they stepped onto their home turf at Sanford Sports Complex for the West Region boys soccer championship game.

Last year the Sabers had played their final regular-season game against Minot, lost it and then lost again against the same Magicians squad when the two played for the West Region title a week later.

This time around, Legacy was coming in with a win in that final regular-season game — this time against Jamestown, also their opponent Saturday evening — and needed a win to secure their first-ever West Region title.

Thanks to second-half goals from Reece Snow and Uriel Rivera, Legacy erased the bad memories of last year by winning this year's West Region championship game to secure their first conference title, 2-1.

"The boys worked hard all year after we lost in last year's championship game, they were focused on coming back and getting to the championship game and finishing business this time around," Sabers head coach Tom Marcis said. "Because of different things, the last two weeks of the season were really tournament games for us; Minot was undefeated and we had to beat them and we beat them, then to tie for the regular season conference title, we had to beat Jamestown, and we beat Jamestown."

"This one feels good, it was a lot of hard work," Sabers midfielder Uriel Rivera said. "We're ready for state."

Saturday's game couldn't have started worse for Legacy.

Not only did Jamestown press hard and give the Sabers everything they could handle, a hand ball resulted in a penalty kick for Jamestown not three minutes in.

Legacy goalie Liam Horner (11 saves) actually made a save on the initial penalty attempt by Brady Harty, but Harty followed up his chance before Horner could grab the rebound and kicked it into the net for an early 1-0 Blue Jays lead.

"That was their best chance of the day because our defense came through and played solid," Marcis said. "We have had to shift some guys around on the back end, and it showed with us being able to play multiple parts back there."

The goal off a penalty kick was the second of the season by Harty against the Sabers, and it gave Jamestown a lead after not having scored against the Sabers at all in the regular season finale.

"That was the first goal Liam's given up in the five games he played," Marcis said. "It was on a rebound, too. He's got a high save percentage."

Length of downtime was an issue for his squad's slow start on Saturday, according to Mar-cis, with the Sabers not having played for 10 days after spending much of the regular season playing two or even three games a week.

“By Tuesday, the guys were ready to play, so it was a bit anti-climatic waiting as long as we did,” Marcis said. “Fortunately they were able to shift gears and get back into game mode. Getting out of our regular routine definitely made a difference for

When the first-half malaise wore out, the difference was noticeable.

“That goal they scored made us more determined to score,” Rivera said. “We just kept doing what we were doing to get that score.”

Jamestown went from largely controlling play through the first 20 minutes to having to battle their hardest just to keep the Sabers from tying the game.

They did manage to accomplish that through the end of the first half, due in part to some unlucky shots from the Sabers as well as some saves by goalie Grant Lunde.

“Having a back press is very important, the way to overcome them when they have the ball is that back press,” Marcis said. “The guys up high can’t stay up and wait for the ball, they have to get back. We did a better job in the second half of backpressing so they didn’t know where our guy was coming from. That gave us more possession because we were able to get the ball.”

Legacy’s pressure finally broke through less than two minutes into the second half.

Not more than a minute after the Sabers nearly forced Lunde into a goal-scoring rebound with a follow-up shot that clanged off the crossbar, Legacy leading goal-scorer Ben McDonald worked his way down the goal line and made a one-touch pass through traffic to Reece Snow, who got enough on the ball to send it into the back of the net to tie the game up.

“At halftime the guys knew what they needed to do and were already starting to do it on their own,” Marcis said. “They came out on fire to start the second half and that set the tone for the rest of the half for us.”

“That definitely lifted us up, it really gave us the energy we needed to win,” Rivera said.

The Sabers kept the pressure up, and with more and more shots sailing over, around and off the posts of the Jamestown goal, the go-ahead score was building up.

It was, coincidentally enough, exactly what gave Jamestown the lead that cost them a tie — a penalty in the penalty box against probably the worst player on the Sabers to tackle with the game on the line: sophomore Uriel Rivera.

Rivera made the Blue Jays pay, rocketing a shot past Lunde to give Legacy their first lead of the game.

“I don’t know how many times we’re going to hit the crossbar today, and they weren’t weak crossbars either, we were smacking them, but that’s soccer, as big a goal as it is, it’s still a game of inches,” Marcis said.

“I thought about nothing and just shot the ball on net,” Rivera said of his game-winning shot.

The game did get physical in the second half, particularly after Rivera’s go-ahead goal, as both teams were shown a pair of second-half yellow cards. The refs timed them well to keep the game under control and neither team got out of hand, which was a plus to Marcis.

“Yellow cards are part of the game, and you want both sides under control and that’s what the cards are for,” Marcis said. “We got a few, but that helps keep the game under control.”

The rest of the game was focused on what Legacy has done better than any other team in the state: keeping their opponent off the scoreboard.

Helping Legacy with that goal was their possession offense, which gave vanishingly few chances for Jamestown to build up any kind of run.

Jamestown did manage a few chances, but Legacy's defense, rotating plenty down the stretch, held the line and Horner, who has taken over as Legacy's starting goalie with previous goalie Nathaniel Olheiser moving onto the playing field, made five stops to earn the win.

"Our defense knew what Jamestown was going to do going in, or at least anticipated it, but those long runs are a crapshoot for both the offensive and defensive team," Marcis said. "The offensive team only needs to be right once on those while the defense needs to be right all the time.

"Both teams were cramping down the stretch, and with how much this game means, it was a lot of juggling to keep guys on the field."

The test that Jamestown has presented the Sabers this year, as well as in years past, is one that Marcis appreciates, and all the more that Saturday's game wasn't an elimination game like the last few times the teams had met in the West Region tournament.

"The first two years we went to state, we knocked Jamestown out from going," Marcis said. "This was different, because we were playing but both are getting to go. Brandi's done a great job there, and I'm happy for her to be coach of the year as she's turned that program around from missing state last year to making it this year."

After 10 days to rest and prepare for Saturday's conference final, a shorter break now awaits the Sabers before their next game, as they are scheduled to play in Thursday's state tournament opener against East Region No. 4 seed Grand Forks Red River (8-7-1) at 12 p.m.

As for Jamestown, the Blue Jays will face East No. 3 West Fargo (85-2) at 6:45 p.m., with Fargo Davies (10-2-2) playing Minot (10-16) at 2:15 p.m. and Fargo Shanley (13-1-2) playing Bismarck (7-7-3) at 4:30 p.m. playing in between.

"First thing we do is start looking at some film, we've only seen North out of the East and they're not in," Marcis said.

"We haven't done much of that because we didn't know who our opponent will be. We'll be ready on Thursday."

LEGACY 2, JAMESTOWN 1

Jamestown 1 0 — 1

Legacy 0 2 — 2

First half: 1. Jamestown, Brady Harty (Unassisted), third minute.

Second half: 2. Legacy, Reece Snow (Ben McDonald), 42nd minute. 3. Legacy, Uriel Rivera (penalty kick), 57th minute.

Goaltender saves: Jamestown — Grant Lunde 5-6—11. Legacy — Liam Horner 6-5—11.

Yellow cards: Jamestown — Jackson Steele, John Belzer. Legacy — Uriel Rivera, Dillan Heidt.

Corner kicks: Jamestown — 2. Legacy — 3.

Records: Jamestown 11-2-2 overall; Legacy 13-1-2 overall.

WEST REGION ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM Bismarck: Liam Weis, Sr., Centerback; Logan Reuschlein, Sr., Left middle; Bryce Vatnsdal, Sr., Centerback. **Century:** Carter Swenson, Sr., Defender; Abel Cramer, Soph., Defender.

Dickinson: Owen Bittner, Sr., Midfielder/Defender; Francis Kouda, Sr., Midfielder/Defender.

Jamestown: Connor Traut, Sr., Midfielder; Grant Lunde, Jr., Goalkeeper; Brady Harty, Jr., Midfielder; Gabe Jenison, Jr., Defense; Iddi Ramadhani, Jr., Midfielder.

Legacy: Ben McDonald, Sr., Midfielder; Nate Ohlheiser, Sr., Goalkeeper/Defender; Reece Snow, Sr., Midfielder; Kamden Kooiman, Jr., Midfielder; Uriel Rivera, Soph., Midfielder.

Mandan: Andrew Catalano, Sr., Forward; Sam Pierce, Sr., Midfielder.

Minot: Brayden Oswald, Sr., Midfielder; Dylan Helde, Sr., Defender; Syrus Mayne, Sr., Forward; Samuel Echanis, Jr., Midfielder.

Williston: Pablo Morales Sanchez, Sr., Midfielder.

Individual awards

Senior Athlete of the Year: Brayden Oswald, Minot.

Coach of the Year: Brandi Harty, Jamestown.

