

Legacy reaches title game

Rivera's two goals, Kooiman's goal and assist enough for Sabers to best Minot

JOSH DUNGAN

Bismarck Tribune

Friday evening's boys soccer state semifinal game at the MDU Resources Community Bowl represented the seventh time that Legacy and Minot have played each other in the last two seasons.

The familiarity between the two teams — which includes four regular season matchups, a West Region championship game and last year's state third-place game before Friday's matchup — showed itself early and often in a fast and physical battle between two of the best teams in the state.

Just as they did last season in beating the Magicians in the third-place game, Legacy got the last laugh against Minot in a 4-2 win that sends Legacy to its first-ever boys soccer state title game.

"We wanted to get some guys in the game that hadn't been in the game yet, and Minot kept playing hard to the end," Legacy head coach Tom Marcis said. "We know each other, we knew it would be a hard game, and when it was 3-0 it was hard to believe it would stay there."

"Not even just in school, I play a lot of guys from Minot in club too," Legacy junior midfielder Kamden Kooiman said. "I talk with them all the time outside of games. The rivalry's always been there since I first played soccer in Bismarck. All of us that played in the West Region championship last year remember losing that game, and the feelings that come with it."

"It's an amazing feeling winning this game, because it is, in my opinion, a little more important than that game in the grand scheme of things, and I felt like our team deserved this win."

After spending far too much of their quarterfinal win playing Grand Forks Red River's game, Marcis was pleased with how his team returned to form in focusing on their ball control style of offense.

"We played pretty well for the most part, there was a stretch where we got disjointed," he said. "The guys recovered and got back to it. They can lose their way at times, but we recovered it."

That control gave Legacy the better of the chances in the first half, though they were unable to solve Minot keeper Grayden Wald (13 saves).

Though Legacy controlled play, Minot had its share of chances, making Sabers keeper Liam Horner make six stops of his 14 in the game.

"He was solid back there, there wasn't much he could do on Minot's goals," Marcis said. "It's a full-team effort, and we're fortunate to have a strong squad up and down the line."

For the first 34 minutes, the best chance for either squad came from Legacy, who tested Wald on several occasions but were unable to retrieve rebound opportunities when they presented themselves.

“Against Red River, we weren’t playing our game and we came out sloppy, we were probably lucky to win that game if we’re being honest,” Kooiman said. “With the second chance, we didn’t want to repeat that mistake, and we knew we had to play like we wanted to win every single moment, and we came to do that tonight.”

The following 10 minutes, crossing between halves, was perhaps the best Legacy has played all season on offense.

Star sophomore midfielder Uriel Rivera was in the middle of it all, as he had been in Legacy’s past two games.

Rivera continued his torrid playoff scoring streak and the Sabers earned their first pace-of-play goal of the playoffs late in the first half. After a long ball into the Minot end from Reece Snow, Rivera deked his way into a clean shot on net, and Wald had no chance.

“The boys got their jitters out of the way, we were working some guys back into play and get their legs under them,” Marcis said. “It was really good that we got some run-of-play goals.”

“Before this game, everybody knew we needed to show out and perform against Minot,” Kooiman said. “Everything was going our way.”

The Magicians did have a distinct advantage in set pieces throughout the game, both in free kicks and corners, but were unable to crack Legacy’s defense for the first 40 minutes no matter what style of play they tried.

“For the most part we did OK (against their set pieces),” Marcis said. “There were some breakdowns, but when you have that many set pieces, there’s always going to be some breakdowns.”

Legacy shocked Minot by scoring twice in the first six minutes of play in the second half. Kooiman got a well-placed pass from senior midfielder Isaac Schumacher, and he made it count, beating Wald cleanly.

“I came out ready to play today and I knew exactly what I wanted to do, I was in the zone right from kickoff,” Kooiman said. “If it wasn’t for my teammates giving me the chances I needed, it’s a team game in the end and we all did what we needed to do to make things happen.”

Schumacher got credit for Legacy’s third tally of the game and the second in six minutes, following up a laser of a shot off the Minot crossbar with a header that just evaded the arms of Wald and a Minot defender.

“We were starting to get some guys into the game (after that goal), and maybe we did that a little early, but it’s one of those games where we had to try and get some guys into the game,” Marcis said. “Who knows what or who we’ll need tomorrow.”

Legacy’s third goal, combined with a perhaps too-early start of substitutions into the game for Legacy, seemed to finally wake Minot from its slumber.

The Magicians spent nearly the entire second half on the attack, and while Legacy’s defense and Horner held for a while, they couldn’t stand up forever.

What seemed to kick Minot into an even higher gear was a midfield play where two separate Legacy players went down on hard contact with no calls against them, and then Legacy’s Dillan Heidt was shown a yellow for initiating a third bit of contact straight after.

“When us and Minot play, we play a good, hard game,” Marcis said.

“It can get physical, but we know each other well enough that we’re not trying to hurt them, they’re not trying to hurt us, we’re just trying to play hard.” “It was a super physical game and that comes with the rivalry,” Kooiman said. “All of us love that kind of physical and aggressive and active game.”

After that play, it was all Minot, and they finally broke through against the Sabers with 11:55 to go.

Brayden Oswalt continued a torrid scoring streak in the state tournament by putting a great individual effort together on a run that he then kicked past Horner with no issue to cut Legacy's lead to 3-1.

The lead was halved less than four minutes later off a corner kick, where Minot dribbled the ball into a dangerous spot, put the ball on net, Horner or a Legacy defender stopped the initial shot and Wayne Roberts of the Magicians followed up and just put the ball into the very top front of the net

"Towards the end of the game, Minot really had a lot of momentum," Kooiman said. "I'm glad we got our final goal to solidify the win. We gave them a little too much at the end, which I didn't like, but I'm happy we got the win."

Both teams pressed hard in the final five minutes, with Legacy finally getting possession back and re-asserting some pressure back in Minot's end.

That culminated in another goal by Rivera with six seconds to go, with the assist going to Kooiman, sealing Legacy's first trip to the state title game.

"We've got underclassmen, upperclassmen, it's not one class, all the classes are participating," Mar-cis said. "(Uriel) is a solid scorer for us and we're fortunate he put in two. Kam and Uriel do a great combination back and forth, and they're used to playing in tight spaces."

The loss for Minot was a rare one in that it had been more than three seasons — since September 15 of 2020 in a 4-2 loss to Legacy, in fact — since the Magicians had allowed four goals in a game.

"They played tough defense, the fact we had three goals on them that quickly is amazing," Marcis said. "They are a great team. If you want to do something, you have to play the best."

"Our attacking today was amazing, I was surprised with how aggressive we all were today," Kooiman said. "Dylan Helde is an amazing defender as their center-back, he's a big reason why teams have a tough time scoring against them, and I'm happy we were able to score a lot today."

Legacy now prepares for a tough challenge against Fargo Shanley.

The Sabers and Deacons will enter the state title matchup with identical 15-1-2 records, and sit as the top offenses — Legacy with 56 goals scored in 18 games, Shanley with 51 — and defenses — Legacy with 13 goals allowed in 18 games, Shanley with 14 — in the state.

"Before the season even started, our goal was to make the state championship, and we've done that," Kooiman said. "Now we have to think ahead about how we're going to win this next game. It's about playing all 80 minutes, that's who will deserve to win."

"As a program, we've been working towards this for 11 years," Mar-cis said.

"This is exciting, and we want to enjoy the moment but also put forward our best effort. What's left is now the best records in the state, and that's how it should be. We expect a good game, and what more could you ask for?"

LEGACY 4, MINOT 2

Minot	0	2	—
Legacy	1	3	—

First half: 1. Legacy, uriel Rivera (Reece Snow), 34:25. **Second half:** 2. Legacy, Kamden Kooiman (Isaac Schumacher), 40:24. 3. Legacy, Schumacher (Jayden Ridl), 45:33. 4. Minot, Brayden Oswald (unassisted), 68:05. 5. Minot, Wayne Roberts (unassisted), 71:32. 6. Legacy, Rivera (Kooiman), 79:54.

Goalkeeper saves: Minot — Grayden Wald 9-4—13. Legacy — Liam Horner 6-8—14.

Yellow cards: Minot — Dylan Helde. Legacy — Nathaniel Olheiser, Dillan Heidt.

Corner kicks: Minot — 11. Legacy — 1.

Records: Minot 11-2-6 overall; Legacy 15-1-2.