

Legacy scores late to down Mandan-St. Mary's



[Josh Dungan](#)

Legacy was not at its best while trying to keep its West Region winning streak alive on Thursday night at the Bowl.

Mandan-St. Mary's did its best to be the first team to beat the Sabers in boys soccer this season, playing a physical possession-based game that had Legacy off-kilter as rain sleeted down throughout the game.

Legacy simply had too much talent for the Braves to pin down forever and found a couple of goals late to stay unbeaten in a 2-0 win.

"They came out and did exactly what we expected them to do, they pressed us and moved the ball very well," Sabers assistant coach Ryan Okerson said. "We didn't execute on our side of the ball for the majority of the game, it was frustrating to watch, but we dug down deep in the second half, still wasn't pretty, but managed to pop two in late."

As he has so often this season, Uriel Rivera figured into both goals for the Sabers, as he found first Owan Joyce and then Kellen Okerson in the final 20 minutes of play to get Legacy on the board.

Joyce broke free through the middle of Mandan-St. Mary's defense and capitalized after Rivera's pass, beating Tyler Moe for the first tally of the game.

The Braves pressed hard for the equalizer but Okerson found yards of open space in the final two minutes to cut in on net and again beat Moe.

"It's always great to get those goals, they started seeing things, execution was off the whole game but they started seeing things more in the second half and they started trying to play balls," Okerson said. "It's a relief to get those late goals, I'd rather have them come a lot earlier to take control of games, but that's our M.O. this year, getting them in late and pulling out tight ones."



But before and after Legacy's first goal, they were under serious threat from a Mandan-St. Mary's offense that finished the season without a goal against the Sabers but came close on multiple occasions.

In addition to Legacy's defense just managing to find itself in position to stop several Braves chances, Legacy keeper James Erickson had to be on his toes throughout while making 12 saves.

"We got lucky to not concede (a goal) in the second half on a couple of plays," Okerson said. "It was sloppy at times, it's important to us to work to have players between the ball and goal, having numbers there. Again, not the way we drew it up, but today we'll take it.

"(Erickson) has come up clutch for us a lot this year, in pretty much every game he's been asked to make one or two, sometimes three, big saves and for the most part he's equal to those shots."

Set pieces were neither team's game with the conditions being what they were, as despite nearly a dozen combined corner kicks between the two teams the ball only rarely found a teammate's body or foot for the first touch.

"It was scrappy, that's all I can say about it, scrappy on both sides," Okerson said. "Mandan pulled us into their style of play and we had trouble with them the first time we played them too because of that style. They play a good, physical side of soccer."

Both teams were at their most dangerous during pace of play, and while the Sabers had their moments, the style of play Mandan-St. Mary's employs is a solid counter to Legacy's style of relying on passes and their talent to get them through.

"Any time you get water on the turf, the ball doesn't bounce anymore, it skips and picks up speed," Okerson said. "The guys were a bit off on their first touch in passing, which made it more difficult. We struggled to get things going tonight, we did pull it out but there's a lot of stuff to work on. We didn't play our style of soccer and when we don't play our style we play someone else's style."

Thursday's game against the Braves was the first of Legacy's closing stretch where they do not leave the Bismarck-Mandan area through the end of the state tournament, with their only road games remaining being matchups with Century next Thursday and Bismarck on the final day of the month.

That allows the Sabers to settle in and prepare for another state tournament run, which the Sabers locked up on Thursday as Legacy is sitting 19 points clear of a fourth-place tie between Century and Bismarck, who each have six games remaining and can therefore only earn at most 18 more points.

The only real question is how many more games it will take for Legacy to secure the top seed from the West for this year's tournament, with the Sabers now 13 points clear of second-place Minot and each team only having five more games to play.

"It comes down to focus, the guys tonight stepping out on the field didn't have the focus we normally have, we were resilient but that only takes you so far and we don't want to drop three points because we weren't focused," Okerson said. "It becomes a challenge, this late in the season with what our record is, it becomes tough to keep these guys focused, they start thinking they can't lose.

"We know about Jamestown last year, going undefeated in the regular season and getting beat in state. There's nothing worse than that."

Legacy 2, Mandan-St. Mary's 0

Mandan-St. Mary's;0;0;--;0

Legacy;0;2;--;2

First half: No scoring.

Second half: 1. Leg, Owan Joyce (Uriel Rivera), 63:16. 2. Leg, Kellen Okerson (Rivera), 78:46.

Goalkeeper saves: Mandan-St. Mary's -- Tyler Moe 2-1--3. Legacy -- James Erickson 7-5--12.

Corners: Mandan-St. Mary's 4-2--6. Legacy 2-3--5.

Cards: Legacy -- Okerson (Yellow). Mandan -- Unknown, Yellow.

Records: Legacy 11-0-0 West Region for 33 points, 11-1-0 overall; Mandan-St. Mary's 3-5-3 West Region for 12 points, 3-5-3 overall.