

Legacy survives a scare from Red River

Sabers advance to semifinal against Minot

- JOSH DUNGAN
Bismarck Tribune

Coaches are always careful to insist on the fact that seeds don't mean much when the state tournament arrives; it's eight good teams playing for a state title, nothing more.

The heat of the moment almost cost the West Region's top seed, Legacy, a shot at moving on, but a great individual effort late put the Sabers into the state semifinals with a 2-1 win over Grand Forks Red River at the MDU Resources Community Bowl.

"We knew that coming in, Red River would be a tough, big team that likes to play the long ball, which means you have to be aware on every ball," Legacy head coach Tom Marcis said. "We didn't play our best game, possession-wise, but we played tough and battled to the end."

With the game tied 1-1 late, the Sabers were able to turn to the player that got them the top seed in the first place, Uriel Rivera, for a penalty kick.

Running down the far side of the field on an impressive slash through the Red River defense, Rivera took enough contact in the penalty box to earn a penalty kick in Legacy's second straight game, and for the second straight game, Rivera converted, scoring his 11th goal of the season to give the Sabers the lead with 10:49 to play.

"Uri's been in that position all year long, he made the penalty that won us the West Region title," Marcis said. "You want him on the line when you have (a penalty kick)."

An impressive defensive effort in the final minutes, including several key stops from goalie Liam Horner (nine saves), kept the Sabers in front and sent them to the state semifinals for the second straight season.

"I said from the beginning of the season that we had the two best keepers in the West," Marcis said. "We moved our first-team All-State keeper onto the field to balance out some of our injuries, and since Horner's taken over, he's given up two goals in seven games since he's come back. We have full confidence in Liam in the goal and he showed it in the game today."

Legacy's style of play has been possession-based all year long.

They had almost none of it in the first 40 minutes of play, putting the Roughriders in the driver's seat as far as every offensive stat goes.

"The boys fell into playing Red River's game instead of making Red River play their game," Marcis said. "Red River plays a different style than us, and the boys know that, but when you're in a state game, you can lose perspective on where you're at. Because we were out of our game, we were a little disjointed."

One of the Sabers' few runs into Red River's end of the field in the first half ended with a free kick, and it put the Sabers in the driver's seat for much of the next 20 minutes of game clock.

Kamden Kooiman sent the free kick on net, and with the help of a bounce off the head of a Red River defender, Grand Forks goalie Rylan Holt (five saves) had no chance at a save.

"We work on set pieces a lot, we do score in run of play, it's just unusual that we've scored off set pieces two games in a row," Marcis said. "We had three or four solid chances in run of play, but they didn't click. Fortunately we have guys who can score from all over the place."

Legacy's passing struggled throughout the game, and the Roughriders were ready and waiting to take advantage of any turnover opportunity.

They tied the game up midway through the second half, as they took advantage of a high-contact play that didn't result in a whistle — though Legacy players thought it might and seemed to slow down — and found an opening in Legacy's defense, with Brody Andrade nailing an unstoppable shot past Horner to tie the game at one.

"We tell the guys, it doesn't matter if you think you got fouled or whether you think something is a foul, you have to play to the whistle," Marcis said. "Unfortunately I think a few of our guys (on the goal) thought it was a foul and stopped playing. The referee has control, when he blows the whistle that's when things stop, and until he does, you have to play."

Even scarier for the Sabers' title hopes, the Roughriders followed up Andrade's goal with another golden opportunity, again off the foot of Andrade, that just missed the mark, clanging hard off the crossbar after clearing the arms of Horner before being cleared out of harm's way.

"We kept telling the guys to breathe and not get too excited," Marcis said. "It's easy at a state game where every ball means more, but we had to play our game, take a breath and keep playing our game and we'd be okay."

Legacy's win sends them into the state semifinals with a meeting against Minot, who beat Fargo Davies 3-1 in the second quarterfinal of the day.

Last year, the Sabers fell 3-1 against Fargo Davies in the state semifinals, so they know that their continued path to a state title remains difficult.

"Davies or Minot, doesn't matter who it is, it's going to be a tough match," Marcis said. "We need to settle down, play our game no matter our opponent, and hopefully we can do that tomorrow."