

# Sabers back on the Hunt at State

**Josh Dungan**



At last year's state boys soccer tournament, hosted at the Bismarck Community Bowl, the Legacy Sabers were among the favorites, having won their first West Region championship and earned the top seed out of the West.

Legacy fell just short in the state championship game, losing 2-1 to Fargo Shanley, leaving them needing to reload for another bid for state.

This year was a little less successful, but the Sabers are right back where they wanted to be as the calendar settles into October, in the state tournament with another shot at their first state title.

"That's what you're working for, that your team makes the state tournament," Legacy head coach Tom Marcis said. "We're excited about that. We had a bit of an up-and-down season, but we're coming in relatively healthy and ready for state."

Legacy's defense was strong for much of the season, allowing just 13 goals all year, with five of the 13 coming in two of their first three games against Williston and Jamestown.

A young backfield was led in large part by senior defender Asher Worrel and goalkeeper Liam Horner, with a bevy of younger players getting playing time as the Sabers figured out their rotations.

"We have a talented team but it's younger than last year's team, so some of our younger players had to come of age," Marcis said.

"Ultimately we're playing some of our best ball now at the end of the season, but we knew there would be growing pains.

"Being a younger team at times, we've been working to make sure we're staying in rhythm and playing a controlled but more dynamic game than we've showed at times."

It was Legacy's offense that let them down at times, managing just two goals in four games this year against Minot and Jamestown and getting shut out three different times in a span of five games in the last month of the regular season.

Knowing their offense will be critical to success this weekend, Marcis and the Sabers trained hard and implemented some of their changes on that side of the pitch last Tuesday when they faced Bismarck.

The changes bore success, as the Sabers topped Bismarck 6-0 and followed that win up with a regular season-ending 3-0 win over

Dickinson in which Legacy played more of their reserves once they had taken a lead on the Midgets.

"We didn't play too poorly on defense, it was more our offense that let us down a little," Marcis said. "We've been working on things, it showed in the Bismarck game with some of the things we wanted to work on, then we got some guys who hadn't gotten much varsity time play."

Even with their changes, four players in particular will be called upon to provide Legacy its offense this weekend, led by seniors Kamden Kooiman (12 goals, nine assists) and Ryker Zietz (five goals, 10 assists) and juniors Uriel Rivera (13 goals, three assists) and Riley Ketterling (four goals, six assists).

Kooiman has been ailing a bit, so his ability to play at full health will make a big impact for the Sabers.

"Our defense will be solid regardless, if our offense plays too direct and not dynamic enough, that will be the difference," Marcis said. "We have to stay in our game plan, everybody knows their role."

"Kamden was hurting a bit and we're waiting on a few other guys, it's too early to know but we have a few guys that are tweaking so we'll see if they'll be able to play."

Opposing the Sabers to open the state tournament this year is Fargo Davies, an old rival of Legacy that has beaten them both times they have faced off in the state tournament.

The Eagles, who went 10-2-2 in conference play and are seeded second out of the East, feature plenty of upperclassmen, including nine seniors and a trio of juniors.

"We've lost to them twice at state, and we'd like to avenge some of those earlier losses," Marcis said. "Our offense will be how we like to play, we just need to be aware of them. They're a good technical team, so we have to make sure we're not getting caught out of position. We have to play solid defense and look for our openings and being more dynamic on the offensive end of things."

Marcis cautions anybody who plays the Sabers that they aren't a cakewalk of a third seed for a higher seed to step over on their way to a semifinals or finals berth.

"We're a third seed, but we're pretty good, we're a better third seed than most," Marcis said. "If anybody takes us for granted because of our seed, they'll be surprised."

The Sabers and Eagles round out the final day of the state tournament with the 6:45 p.m. game on Thursday. If the Sabers were to win, they would play in the 6:45 p.m. semifinal game on Friday evening. If they lost, they would play the 2:15 p.m. loser-out game on Friday afternoon.