

Shanley denies Legacy's hopes for a state title

Deacons use set pieces to win program's second championship

- MIKE KRAFT
Bismarck Tribune

The Legacy boys soccer team was looking to take a page out of Fargo Shanley's history book and become the first time to win a state title in their first championship game appearance since the Deacons accomplished that feat in 2008.

Shanley wasn't interested in sharing the spotlight.

Andrew Schneider netted the game-winning goal in the 60th minute off a set piece, helping to secure the Deacons' second title and denying Legacy a chance at its first with a 2-1 victory in the state championship game on Saturday at the Bismarck Community Bowl.

"Hasn't really sunk in yet I don't think," Shanley coach Ryan Christianson said. "This is my fourth one with the boys."

Finally got one, especially with these special group of seniors. It's a special moment, not just for me but my coaching staff and for the program."

Shanley's victory in the title game snapped a streak of five straight losses in championship matches. The Deacons had to settle for second place in 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 and most recently in 2021 when they lost an epic 10-9 battle in penalty kicks.

Set pieces proved to be the difference maker, as all three goals came after a stoppage in play. The one that delivered the Deacons (16-1-2) a championship trophy started 55 yards away from goal.

Shanley's Peter Noah served up a ball from near midfield that resulted in a race between Schneider and Legacy goalkeeper Liam Horner for possession. As Horner went up to grab the ball out of mid air, Schneider got just enough of it with the flick of his head to cause the ball to go through Horner's hands and into the back of the net.

"I saw the ball coming and I hear the keeper yell that he had it and I knew I was going to be there," Schneider said. "I just went

for it and knew I had to get a flick on it and it was going to go in. I looked back and it was right in the net. It felt surreal."

Shanley's first goal originated much closer to net. The Deacons won a free kick 25 yards from goal in the 33rd minute and Andrew Kankelfritz directed a low-angle shot through Legacy's wall in front that found the back of the net for the game's first goal.

"Set pieces are always tough because all it takes is one bounce," Legacy coach Tom Marcis said. "Set pieces are always dangerous, especially from the area of the field where they scored off of. You never quite know where the ball's going to go."

The Sabers (15-2-2) found the equalizer on a stoppage play of their own in the second half. Legacy was awarded a penalty kick after Shanley goalkeeper Matt Berg took down a Saber player in the box in the 50th minute. Reece Snow was called on to take the penalty kick and he delivered, beating Berg with a shot to the right side.

"This team never quits," Marcis said. "They play hard to the end and because we can be dynamic on the field we're never out of a game. We can score off of set pieces. We can score off of PKs,

but we're a team and we'll be a team again next year that can score from anywhere on the field."

Berg was solid from there. While holding onto a slim lead, Berg fended off a pair of corner kicks and made a game-saving stop on Uriel Rivera with just seven minutes remaining in what would be Legacy's best remaining chance of the game.

Berg finished with seven saves.

"It was a big save," Berg said. "I relied heavily on my muscle memory and getting to the ball confidently and making sure I get a firm hand on that ball and that's just what I focus on."

The bright lights of the championship stage didn't seem to phase the Sabers. They surrendered just one corner kick all game while generating four of their own.

Horner stopped 11 shots and got a defensive assist from teammate Jayden Ridl with the match still tied, blocking a shot with his right shin that was headed toward an empty net.

"They had a great season and they didn't leave anything on the field so they played to the end," Marcis said. "They got scored on in two set pieces and that's going to happen. I don't think we got outplayed. They put in two and we put in one but I didn't feel

like we got outplayed. The boys played their game. They had some really good chances, they just didn't go in the back of the net."

The match had the type of physicality expected with so much on the line. In total, the referee handed out six yellow cards — four to the Deacons.

"They played composed for the most part," Marcis said. "It's going to be a hard-fought game so there was some physicality in the game and it was to be expected."

Legacy's Kamden Kooiman, Nathaniel Olheiser and Rivera were named to the all-state tournament team along with Shanley's London Gray, Michael Noack, Noah and Berg.

It was a year of firsts for the Sabers. They won a share of their first regular season West Region title, earning them the No. 1 seed heading into the conference tournament. They won their first West Region tournament title and used that momentum to propel them to their first state championship game appearance.

For Marcis, it's a tough team to say goodbye to.

"It's a great group of guys to work with," Marcis said. "They've been a lot of fun. Yeah, we won a lot of games, but it wasn't just

that. They're a great group of guys to be around. They listen. They were always trying to get better. All the teams coming after them are going to have a hard time keeping up with that."