

Concord-Carlisle overtakes Masco in second half

By Mike Grenier , Staff Writer
Salem News

—
LOWELL - Concord-Carlisle soccer standout Michael Burke took a big blow to the head in a regular season game against Westford Academy more than two weeks ago. The resulting concussion was serious enough that some people believed his high school career was over.

Instead, Burke played what could have been the game of his life here Saturday, scoring three goals in the second half to end Masconomet's season, 4-3, in the Division 2 North semifinals at Cawley Stadium.

It was the second straight year that Masconomet (16-2-4) has been ousted by Concord-Carlisle (19-0-2) in the North sectional. But this one might hurt even more because the Chieftains built a 3-0 lead and saw it evaporate against a powerful team that won the state championship last year.

Burke's game-winner came on what can only be described as a Manny Ramirez-type line drive from about 20 yards out, coming with just two minutes left in regulation. The goal upped his season total to 20, breaking a school record.

No wonder this kid is going to Division 1 George Washington University in D.C. next year. He's got that kind of ability.

"The concussion was pretty bad," said Burke, who was injured in a nasty collision with the Westford goalie. "Some parents thought I wouldn't be back, and I wasn't sure. I couldn't do anything for two weeks. But I started practicing a couple of days ago, and felt better on Friday."

Still, a lack of game conditioning led Burke to believe he might only be able to give his team one good half against Masco. The Chieftains wished that had been true. Burke was a constant menace in the air and handling the ball.

"The kid has a concussion for a couple of weeks, then he comes back to play against us," said Masco coach Len Emmons. "That's the kind of luck we're having."

"He was a good player, but I thought his teammates did a really nice job of setting him up. Burke was a good finisher."

For a long time, it looked like the Chieftains would spring the upset. Sophomore Ali Olia scored two goals in the first 22 minutes, assisted by John Miller and Kevin Barranello, respectively. Concord-Carlisle goalie James Smith must have thought he was under siege a few minutes later when one of his teammates accidentally put one past him, giving Masconomet a 3-0 advantage.

"Olia had a fantastic first half," said Emmons. "We were in pretty good shape."

But top-seeded Concord-Carlisle refused to look at 3-0 as a huge deficit. It felt it had to stay with its game plan and chip away.

"The kids were so calm," said Concord-Carlisle coach Ray Pavlik. "We had to get out of that big hole and make it a closer game - then we could go for broke."

Robert Schmidt-Chang scored late in the half for Concord-Carlisle, and that was a major psychological lift for the defending state champs.

"There was a bunch of time left," said Burke, explaining why his team didn't panic. "The coach was the calmest guy on the sidelines. We thought we had a chance to come back."

Burke, who should've been exhausted, was omnipresent in the second half. He scored from point-blank range to cut it 3-2, and his last two goals were bullets. Perhaps he just didn't want to spend any more energy in overtime.

"After missing all that time with the concussion, did you see (Burke's) goals? They were unbelievable," marveled Pavlik.

To Masco's credit, it never went into a shell with a 3-0 lead. The Chieftains kept attacking, but were overcome by a relentless opponent.

"I was pleased with the way we were playing," said Emmons. "I thought it was going to be our offense against their offense. They just played more physical in the second half and the officials let them play. They took advantage of it. Our problem was that we didn't mark up as well in the second half."

Emmons can see Concord-Carlisle repeating as Division 2 state champions. "They could," said the Masco coach. "I think the North bracket is the toughest of all."

Concord-Carlisle plays Dracut today (12:30 p.m.) in the North final at Cawley Stadium.

Copyright © 1999-2006 cnhi, inc.