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MIAA boys soccer: Sandwich run ends

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Sandwich's David McKiernan, right, and Adam Sholi head off the field after falling to Concord-Carlisle 1-0 in the MIAA Division 2 boys soccer state semifinal Thursday night at the Manning Bowl in Lynn.

RON SCHLOERB/Cape Cod Times

By **Rob Duca**
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LYNN — It was an agonizing way to lose. But as the night progressed and Concord-Carlisle kept attacking the Sandwich goal, it almost felt inevitable.

Sandwich High's quest for a Division 2 state boys soccer championship came to an end last night in the semifinals with a 1-0 loss at Manning Bowl.

The Patriots scored the game's lone goal with 13:06 remaining when Seth Bird headed home Sam Fell's corner kick. The score ruined a spectacular evening for Sandwich goalie Kyle Van Cleef, who was brilliant in keeping the Blue Knights in the game.

The Blue Knights finish 18-2-3, while the Patriots improve to 16-3-3 and advance to Sunday's state final at Worcester State College against Palmer.

"(Concord-Carlisle) ran the field really well in transition," Sandwich coach Ted Tedeschi said. "Maybe we could have done a better job in some areas, but they probably had something to do with that."

The Patriots dominated the contest, mounting threat after threat and failing to break through only due to Van Cleef's outstanding play. But the Sandwich keeper was finally beaten when Bird out-fought a couple of defenders to get his head on the ball and direct it under the crossbar.

"We played our hearts out," Tedeschi said. "Obviously, you didn't see the Sandwich team you saw the other night. We knew that with each step closer we got, the teams were going to be better. (C-C) deserved to win. They're a good club, they moved the ball really well and they put the pressure on us."

The Blue Knights, co-champions of the Atlantic Coast League with Nauset, were playing in their first state semifinal after capturing the South Sectional with a thrilling 2-1 double-overtime triumph over Hopkinton.

It was somewhat understandable that the Blue Knights were sluggish at the start. They left for Manning Bowl at 3 p.m. yesterday, fighting traffic across the gridlocked Sagamore Bridge and once again in rush hour through Boston, not arriving in Lynn until nearly 6.

Not surprisingly, the Patriots dominated the first half, with their finest opportunity coming in the closing minute when Aaron Nickelsberg nearly scored from 10 yards. Nickelsberg cut right to left and unleashed a left-footed rocket to the far corner from the middle of the field. But Van Cleef made a brilliant diving save, steering the ball away from trouble.

"I can't say enough about my keeper," Tedeschi said. "He had a chance tonight to show his stuff. He came up with some big saves."

That wasn't C-C's only opportunity. Mike O'Brien failed to convert on a wide-open net at 15:41 from inside 10 yards. The ball landed at his feet off a rebound, but he fired high and wide as the Sandwich defense moved in to bump him.

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The Blue Knights were unable to mount a sustained attack all night. David McKiernan crashed the net for a pair of headers that proved to be threats, and Dallas Donovan forced a save from C-C goalie Cam McGrory with another header. But high-scoring Peter Alvarenga was bottled up. Even worse, he gingerly exited with an apparent back injury with 7:31 remaining in the first half after taking a tumble. He was back on the field to begin the second half.

The second half began in the same fashion as the first half concluded, with the Patriots attacking the Sandwich net and Van Cleef keeping the game scoreless. Only three minutes had passed when Van Cleef was forced to make another diving stop on Will Toczylowski's shot from close range.

It was James Doleman's turn to maintain the deadlock for Sandwich with 25:08 left when he blocked Dan Tchen's shot that appeared headed past Van Cleef.

With overtime looming, the persistent Patriots finally found the back of the net. And with that, the greatest soccer season in Sandwich history was over.

"We came up one step short, but it was a fantastic season," Tedeschi said.

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