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SPORTS

C-C Senior Ready for State Tourney Run

Nickelsberg, injured during Patriots' 2009 state championship postseason, set for semifinals.

By **Jared Wright** November 17, 2010

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Aaron Nickelsberg was injured at the end of the Concord-Carlisle High School boys' soccer team's last playoff run when the Patriots won the Division 2 state championship in 2009. But this year he is a team captain, and healthy, so it makes the prospect of contending for another title even more sweet.

"The excitement of the tournament is fantastic," said Nickelsberg, "and to lead them through in my last season is special."

C-C opens play in the state tournament tonight with a semifinal matchup against D-2 South champion Canton High School at Veterans Memorial Stadium. The state final is slated for Saturday at a site to be determined. Nipmuc beat Southwick in the semifinals and now awaits an opponent.

Tonight between the Patriots and Canton will be a game of titan teams.

Canton boasts Ramon Ambrosio, an all-state player, and a slew of other dangerous strikers. The C-C defense will have a lot to contend with. The Patriots' Chris Walker-Jacks and the defense will have to continue to put out great performances.

"They're a very good team," said C-C coach Ray Pavlik, of Canton. "We need to make sure we can execute quickly and well, especially on defense. The benefit I have, though, is that these guys are pretty [darn] competitive. The captains and seniors they are good leaders, but more than that, everyone out there is competitive."

Pavlik didn't lie. Concord-Carlisle run their practices like a game. And players get frustrated and push themselves to do their best on every touch of the ball.

There wasn't a modicum of complacency on the practice field on Tuesday. Right before speaking with a reporter, Nickelsberg scored in the practice, and he jumped with the satisfaction of the goal.

"That intensity in practice is because of the depth of our program. Really, from youth programs on up Concord and Carlisle are strong, so when I need these kids to step up and into the system they can. You know I just do fine tuning," said Pavlik.

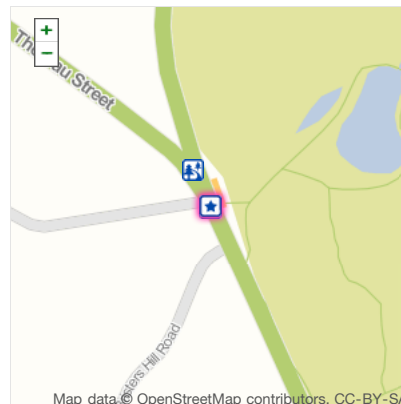
That competitiveness didn't take away from the enjoyment for the players though. They went from yells to laughs seamlessly. Once the crossbars were hit three times by C-C's offense, and Pavlik just sighed, "nobody hits more posts, huh?" Everyone laughed.

"My best friends are on the team," said Nickelsberg. "I love this team, and if we play our best, I think we can win states again."

The Patriots had their first two day lead up to a game in two weeks and they feel prepared to contend for the title.

"We don't want to look back, yet," said Pavlik. "We tell them after each win, you know, to congratulate themselves for what they've accomplished, but their goal is to win a state championship."

On Wednesday night the Patriots will apply all of their talents to try and scare off the Canton Bulldogs and storm into the state championship game.



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