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Canton High boys soccer loses state semifinal

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For The Patriot Ledger

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QUINCY — The Canton High School boys soccer team boasted superb defense and potent offense all season long, en route to the Division 2 South Sectional title.

Wednesday night the Bulldogs' defense was still outstanding, but the offense never really got untracked as defending state champion Concord-Carlisle defeated Canton 2-0 in a Div. 2 state semifinal at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Canton (17-1-4) played its foes more or less evenly through a scoreless first half, and had at least half a dozen bona fide scoring chances. But when a scramble off a corner kick 2:13 into the second half resulted in a rebound-goal for the Patriots (20-1-1), Canton had trouble regaining any momentum. To make it just a bit more frustrating for the Hockomock League champs, C-C pressure in the 66th minute led to an own-goal on a miscue in the box for the second tally.

Bulldog forwards had problems getting inside the 35-yard line against the Patriots, and when they did, C-C netminder Cam McGrory was solid.

Canton's own goalkeeping star, junior Colby Gavigan, couldn't add to his remarkable season's total of 13 shutouts, but he kept his mates in the game with some topnotch saves.

Gavigan's best effort may have come in the 71st minute, when Patriot sophomore star Mikey O'Brien broke loose on the right side and darted in on a clean breakaway, only to be denied from about 10 feet out when Gavigan came rushing out to make a clutch save with his torso.

"Their goalkeeper made a couple of close-range stops that were excellent," said C-C coach Ray Pavlik, who has won two state championships at the school. "That save on Mikey O'Brien late was an unbelievable stop."

But ultimately Gavigan's heroics were not enough, and the Bulldogs saw their glittery postseason run halted in this, the putative EMass final.

"I thought we played a great first half, against a great team," said Canton coach Danny Erickson, who will lose six seniors. "Concord-Carlisle was super-organized, and very difficult to break down. Still, I felt we played about as well as we can during that first half, and I couldn't have been much happier with that.

"Colby played very well, and overall we played real well. It's hard to be disappointed with this effort or this season, but, of course, when you get this far you want to take care of business."

"In the second half, that early goal knocked us off our game," Erickson added. "We never seemed able to get back in gear. Had we gotten a break or two early, it could've been a different game. It never felt like we had a very cohesive attack tonight, especially in the last third of the field. In the middle third of the field, we played just as well as they did, but we had problems getting into their end."

On the first scoring play, C-C's Alex Puchrik's corner kick from the right was headed perfectly by Seth Bird in the middle of the box, but bounced off the crossbar. In the ensuing scrum for the rebound, O'Brien booted it home at 42:13.

"Some days it just comes down to a loose ball in the box," said Pavlik. "That was not the prettiest goal, but Mike has had a tremendous playoff run for us. Seth had made a great effort heading that first ball, and then Mike followed the rebound."

Canton's scoring bids were few and far between in the second half. Junior Scott Levy penetrated the Patriots defense in the 56th minute, but when he sent a crossing pass perfectly into the crease, no one was there except McGrory. A Chris Murray free kick from 35 yards out in the 59th minute was smothered in the box.

On the second score, a Patriot forward was battling a defender in the middle of the box, and as the ball bounced up, the fullback headed it back towards where Gavigan had been. But the goalie was at that moment rushing out to grab the ball, and as everyone just froze as the ball bounced into the empty net. Puchrik, the nearest Patriot, was credited with the goal.

"That was a difficult situation for the defender," noted Pavlik. "Our guy was running right up the kid's back, and he had to do something. But it is also a result of us applying that pressure."

Milton Academy advances

Megan Kim scored with 3 minutes remaining in the second overtime Wednesday to lift the Milton Academy girls soccer team to a 2-1 victory over BB&N in a NEPSAC quarterfinal in Cambridge.

The Mustangs (8-2-8) will play at Westminster in Saturday’s semifinals. The championship game is Sunday at 11 a.m. at Williston-Northhampton.

Abby Lebovitz put Milton Academy ahead 1-0 early in the second half before BB&N tied it up. Catherine Hartigan (Milton) assisted Lebovitz’s goal.

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