

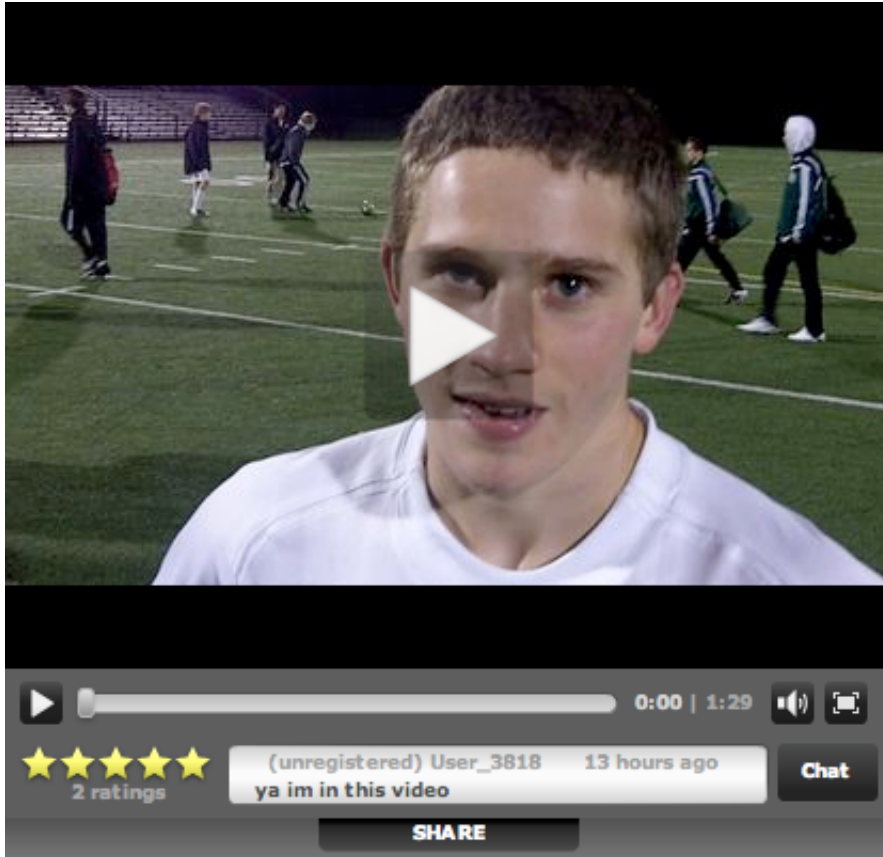
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Concord-Carlisle rolling to boys' soccer final

By Scott Barboza



QUINCY, Mass. – Championships are typically won by teams that are coming together at the right time.

Although defending state Division II boys' soccer title-holder Concord-Carlisle is no stranger to the postseason stage, the Patriots only have begun to put together a consistent lineup in their last five matches. C-C has suffered through injuries to core players at times, particularly in the midfield, so the Patriots endured most of the season mixing and matching lineups while relying on their depth.

Lucky for C-C, things have really come together at the right time and the Patriots earned a chance to play for yet another state title by winning the Eastern Mass championship with a 2-0 win over South sectional champion Canton at Veterans Stadium on Wednesday.

“I think it all goes back to practicing,” Patriots forward Mikey O’Brien said. “Every day in practice, we come out really hard. I think at one point during our season, I think of the 23 players on our team 10 or so were injured.

“But we kept working and our roster in that situation because we had a lot of good players who can step in in those situations.”

The teams played to a scoreless first half, but the Patriots (20-1-1) were quick to start in the second stanza. In the 43rd minute, Seth Bird clanged a header off the post on a corner kick directed by Alex Puchrik. However, O'Brien was on the spot to collect the ricochet in the box and put C-C up, 1-0.

“Sometimes it comes down to a loose ball in the box, a scramble and can you get to it first?” Patriots head coach Ray Pavlik said. “Mike’s work ethic is tremendous and he’s scored a couple of huge goals for us in the tournament run here.”

C-C added an insurance marker in the 66th minute with Puchnik getting credit for the goal that was last touched by a Bulldog defender.

The Patriots backline kept the clamps on Canton’s forwards throughout.

“They were very difficult to break down,” Bulldogs head coach Danny Erickson said. “I thought we played as well as we were going to play in that first half. I thought that we did a lot of very nice stuff, but we just had difficulty breaking them down and getting behind them.”

C-C’s defenders led by junior Chris Walker-Jacks helped to keep Canton’s shifty forwards, like Igor Perun and Ramon Ambrosio, off the score sheet and limited Canton’s chances in front of keeper Cam McGrory.

“The back line played fantastic,” Pavlik said. “They have a couple of really good forwards. They play with three frontrunners up top and we were under a lot of pressure all night, but the kids really just marked individually, one [versus] one.”

The Patriots will face Nipmuc on Saturday at Worcester State College in search of their third state title in the last five years. First kick is at 5:30 p.m.

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