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## Defending champions nip Warriors D2 BOYS' SOCCER STATE FINAL: CONCORD-CARLISLE 2, NIPMUC 1

By Craig Holt CORRESPONDENT

**WORCESTER** — To be the best, you must beat the best, and the Nipmuc Regional boys' soccer team came close to doing that in yesterday's Division 2 state final against Concord-Carlisle.

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The Warriors battled back and tied the score at the half, but could not tally again. The Patriots' Stowe Simonton broke the deadlock as the defending champions went on to a 2-1 victory before a large gathering at wind-swept Commerce Bank Field at Foley Stadium.

Nipmuc, which won its last state title in 1994, finished the season 15-5-4. The Patriots, who have won state championships three of the last four years, finished 21-1-1.

"Concord-Carlisle has an excellent team but nobody wants to be second — we came here to win," Nipmuc coach William Leaver said. "I'm disappointed for the seniors, but obviously not disappointed of them. For the juniors and underclassmen, hopefully this is something that will leave a lasting impression. You pour your heart and soul into a big game and sometimes it just doesn't happen."

The Patriots scored the winning goal less than 10 minutes into the second half. After a corner kick, the ball caromed off a Warriors player, and Simonton, a sophomore defender, sped to the middle and knocked in the loose ball. Senior midfielder Alex Puchrik had the assist.

"At first, I didn't even realize that it was going to go in, but when it went in, I was just ecstatic," Simonton said. "Back-to-back titles is great. Hopefully, we'll get another one next year."

Nipmuc, sparked by junior forward Tim Peterman, battled the rest of the way and made several drives. However, Patriot defenders repeatedly blasted the ball back to midfield.

"The game was a scenario of ebbs and flows, especially with all the wind," Leaver said.

"They took advantage of their opening in the second half. Our kids tried to come back, but they have some excellently skilled players. They had one more chance than us, and they made the most of it."

"We knew coming in that Concord-Carlisle had a great team, and we knew we'd have to play our best to beat them," Nipmuc senior midfielder Kelly Rooney said. "They made the shot and they came out on top — just a great team. I never thought we'd get this far at the beginning of the season. Winning CMass was a great honor, as was winning the state semifinal. I'm just so happy to be a member of this team and have such great teammates."

Concord-Carlisle pressured heavily early, but came up empty. That changed at 26:44 when junior forward Mikey O'Brien got hold of a deflected ball and scored from 15 yards.

The ball just eluded Warriors' junior keeper Andrew Morin and ended up in the right corner of the net. Junior midfielder Ethan Atwood had the assist.

Less than five minutes later, Nipmuc junior forward Tanor Jobe scored on a play initiated off a free kick.

“We have the potential to get back here, but there are a lot of very good teams in our district,” Leaver said.

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