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Campo Advances to NCS Semifinals; Acalanes, Miramonte Bow Out

By Karl Buscheck



Ryan Rossi is expected to be named DFAL Defensive MVP.

Photos Gint Federas

Thanks to a 4-3 shootout win, Campo boys' soccer is moving on to the NCS Division II semifinals after drawing 0-0 in double overtime against Montgomery in Santa Rosa on Feb. 20.

"Our focus all year has just been on improving, so that we could be contenders by the time NCS rolled around," head coach Shane Carney explained of his sixth-seed Cougars. "We knew we were going to be very small and very young compared to most opponents, so it's been about working hard, playing smart and improving every night we go out there."

After taking down the No. 3 seed, the Cougars (8-1-3 in league and 16-3-6 overall), who landed in second place in the DFAL, are now set to clash with Concord.

Campo will host the No. 10 seed Minutemen in Moraga at 6 p.m. on Feb. 24. For the Cougars, the entire team has chipped in, but there's a giant in the heart of the defense.

"Honestly, this truly has been a team effort all around this season. We've had solid consistent play and the team often plays better than the sum of the parts," Carney said. "Our senior captain, center back Ryan Rossi is the DFAL Defensive MVP and has saved us many times in the back, but we've got a number of guys who are stepping up late in the season."

In the opening round of NCS, the Cougars didn't waste any time smashing past No. 11 Arroyo 4-1 at home.

"We wanted to play on their nerves and try to get an early lead," Carney said. "We managed to score twice early in the match, which set the tone for the rest of the night."

Acalanes also earned a big win in the opening round, toppling No. 1 seed Redwood 1-0.

"At the end of the day, that's why

you have the playoffs," head coach Paul Curtis said after the No. 16 seed Dons trekked to Larkspur and grabbed the win courtesy of a second-half goal from sophomore Cameron Shapoorian. "Teams have to play each other. And so, it's a matter of execution on the field as to which team is going to end up winning."

Even though the hosts were heavily favored in the tilt, Curtis declined to dub the win an upset.

"I never really consider them an upset because you've got to play the game," Curtis explained. "So, it's a matter of which team executes the best on any given night. It's nice. It's a good win for the boys. I'm happy for them. They've worked hard for it."

The coach also wouldn't bite when asked if the squad's status as the No. 16 seed – despite a 9-9-5 record overall and a 5-5-2 mark in DFAL – served as extra motivation.

"You know, it might have. We didn't really talk about it, to be frank about it," Curtis admitted. "We were pleased to get in and have the opportunity to play. The boys try and take each match one at a time and that was their approach."

The team's NCS Division II run came to a halt on Feb. 20, however, when De Anza edged past Acalanes 2-1 in El Sobrante.

Looking back at the season, Curtis was at a loss when asked to single out an individual Don who had been the star of the show.

"You can hear me hesitate and the hesitation means, 'No.' It's been – different match, different boy," Curtis said. "There are 23 (players) on the roster and I think almost all of them have been man of the match at some point during the season. Very few have two man-of-the-match recognitions. And so, that shows good team work and balance in how they ap-

proach each match."

Like Acalanes, Miramonte cashed out of the postseason in the quarterfinals after losing 3-0 against Marin Academy on Feb. 20.

Marin, the No. 2 seed in the Division III bracket, scored an early goal in San Rafael and sank the Mats with a pair of second-half strikes. Even though the campaign ended, head coach Masood Ahmadi was impressed with his team's showing.

"We had some ups and downs throughout the season with losing some key players due to injury but the players stepped up and the team took on the challenge and overcame the bump(s) to qualify into NCS for a second straight year after many years of not going to the playoffs," Ahmadi said. "This year (was about) taking it one step further than last year."

The No. 7 seed Miramonte (7-8-4 overall and 4-6-2) arrived in the semifinals after thumping Cardinal Newman (No. 10 seed) 4-0 on Feb. 17.

"The key to success in winning this game was that the boys played with lots of confidence," Ahmadi said. "That was the first home playoff game in a very long time at Miramonte for the boys program and I believe the boys were proud of that and made sure to make it count."



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