

Published March 8th, 2017

Acalanes claims NCS D2 boy's soccer title

By Karl Buscheck



Mason Larrick (20) and Brody Quinn (14) Photos
Gint Federas

minute of double overtime courtesy of Gabe Singer, who found the back of the net for the fifth time in four playoff games.

The senior striker was playing as part of an injury-depleted starting 11 that featured four Dons reserves.

"This team was unique in that they pulled together as a unit perhaps as well or better than any team that I've coached," Curtis said. "And that became a real strength for them.

"The other strength was the depth of talent that we had," Curtis added.

Two of those fill-ins were starting along Acalanes' stingy backline. At the heart of the defense was center back Chris Rogers.

"Chris was the most outstanding defensive player on our team, as selected by his teammates," Curtis explained. "He's just a sophomore, made first-team all-league and was a huge part of that whole defensive unit."

Junior goalkeeper Luke Denham was another indispensable member of the group. During the regular season, Denham and the defense were all but impenetrable.

In league play this year, the defense allowed two goals," Curtis said. That's it. Just two. I've never seen anything like it."

That success spilled over into the postseason, as the team permitted only a couple of goals against its four NCS opponents.

"He made several big saves (in the title game)," Curtis said. "In fact, each batch of the playoffs he made several big saves (on) close-in shoots that are goals unless he plays spectacularly. So, that just adds to the excitement of it."

While the Dons dispatched Casa Grande 4-1 in the opening round, the road to becoming NCS champs was not an easy one. Acalanes toppled Campolindo 1-0 in the quarterfinals before edging the No. 3 seed Richmond 2-1 - in double overtime - in the semifinals.

By the time the finals arrived, the Dons had become masters at remaining calm and executing in pressure-packed moments.

"I think that just added more fuel for our boys (after) having gone through a very close Campolindo match and then really surviving a double overtime (game against Richmond)," Curtis said. "They had more experience in tight situations than the other team did and I think that paid off at the end as well - helping them be calm in the face of a very hectic last match."

For the Cougars, the semifinals exit brought an end to the team's 11-10-4 season (3-4-3). Campolindo had entered the NCS Division 2 bracket as the No. 7 seed. Miramonte, who grabbed the No. 12 seed in the Division 3 competition, lost out in the quarterfinals to No. 4 Bishop O'Dowd. The Mats wrapped up the season 10-10-2 (5-4-1 in league).

On the path to securing the North Coast Section Division 2 boys' soccer championship, Acalanes didn't let in multiple goals in any of the team's final 13 games. In the playoff finals on Feb. 25 in Lafayette, the Dons didn't allow any goals at all, outlasting Montgomery, 1-0, in double overtime.

After the Dons, who MaxPreps ranked as the No. 43 team in the state, capped their 20-2-4 campaign (9-1 in league) with the title-game shutout, head coach Paul Curtis offered a simple message to his squad.

"I always tell them congratulations on the win," Curtis said. "And then I think the key factor was how proud the other coaches and I were of them that they were able to maximize their potential and show tremendous resolve."

Against the No. 5 seed Montgomery, the second-seeded Dons delivered the decisive goal in the second-to-last



Chris Rogers

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA