

Cohesion pays off: Arcata clinches Big 4 soccer title

Neil Tarpey/The Times-Standard

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ARCATA -- Wednesday's warm, sunny weather did not distract them. Instead, they focused on their mission and achieved it.

The Arcata High boys soccer team wrapped up the Big 4 league championship when they defeated Fortuna 7-0, as Jordan Rhode earned a hat trick while Nick Morton added two goals and an assist.

"We were coming out to win the title today and we knew it," said Arcata head coach Jason Ewing.

The championship gives the Tigers (17-2-1 overall, 5-1 in Big 4) an automatic berth in the North Coast Section playoffs, which begin on Nov. 5.

Before the NCS playoffs start, Arcata hosts Ferndale and travels to McKinleyville in their two final regular season matches.

In the first nine minutes on Wednesday, Arcata had three corner kicks and Matt Macari drilled a hard shot from the right that bounced off the far post, but the Huskies and keeper Roberto Diaz kept things scoreless.

Then at the 11-minute mark, Tiger sweeper Alex Cunha launched a long kick upfield to Tiger forwards Rhode and Ty Watkins who applied pressure around the box. Fortuna had trouble clearing the ball and accidentally put in an own-goal at the 11-minute mark.

"When you find a goal they sometimes can come in

bunches," noted Ewing.

The first goal seemed to relax the home team, and 10 minutes later they scored again.

This time it was Arcata defender Cole Goodrich who started the process when he stopped a Husky attack and cleared the ball up ahead. Rhode ended up heading the ball over a Fortuna defender and then directing a deft short shot into the net.

Two minutes later Watkins sent a through pass to Morton who was streaking into the box and he found the net from in close for a 3-0 lead.

In the second half, for the first 15 minutes the Huskies linked passes up top and threatened to score.

Sophomore Rigo Ruiz, who switched shoes at halftime, blasted a rocket from the left side -- probably Fortuna's best shot of the match -- that went just wide right, and then two minutes later he booted a hard shot from the right but Tiger keeper Clint Long expertly cut down the angle and smothered the ball in his arms.

Arcata started a counterattack and at 58 minutes Morton scored off a good pass from Dillon Sobillo.

Three minutes later Morton and Rhode combined on the best-looking goal of the match when Morton crossed a knee-high pass from near the right corner that Rhode turned on and redirected sharply into the goal.

At the 65-minute mark Sobillo was in the right spot at the right time as he ended up straight-away outside the box and booted it through several Huskies and past Diaz.

Rhode got his hat trick at 73 minutes when he

outhustled two Husky defenders and then, with Diaz caught too far out, calmly kicked a low shot into the far side.

”We came out a little soft, and one of the things we’re needing to progress on is containing,” said Fortuna head coach Robert Calderon.

”They have several kids who can shoot and if you give them a chance they will score.”

Coach Calderon’s assessment accurately describes Arcata, but the Tigers do not just score goals.

The Big 4 champions function like a blue-collar assembly line, with everyone knowing their roles and being prepared to switch and help, with minimal on-field evidence of theatrics or drama that can disrupt or destroy teamwork.

”They are a great team and I wish them the best,” said Calderon.

OTHER SCORES:

Girls Soccer

McKinleyville 3, South Fork 0

Arcata 5, Fortuna 1

Eureka 6, St. Bernard’s 0

Prep Volleyball

Hayfork 3, Southern Trinity 1

Despite their best efforts against a n experience-laden Hayfork squad, the young Warriors fell Wednesday night 12-25, 25-23, 15-25 and 17-25.

Hayfork, comprised mostly of juniors and seniors,

used excellent serves to topple South Trinity, a squad that is loaded freshman and sophomores with only one junior and senior.

The Warriors did take the second game 25-23, however, Hayfork proved too much.

While they fell to 7-6 overall, Southern Trinity remains perfect in Little 5 play at 5-0.

(No other scores were reported by press time.)