



MENDOCINO-LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 14, 2018

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EAGLES BATTLE BUT COME UP SHORT IN SEASON FINALE

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On Monday, the Mendocino College Eagles men's soccer team played its final match of the 2018 season, hosting the Napa Valley Storm. The match was originally scheduled for last Friday, but postponed because of the Mendocino College closure that day due to extremely poor air quality stemming from the Butte County fire.

Going into Monday's match, the Eagles found themselves still in the hunt for a possible Bay Valley Conference championship. This season, with the conference fielding just five teams, the conference part of the schedule included just 8 matches, a team playing the other four conference opponents twice: one match at home and one on the road.

Going into the final week of conference play, four of the teams were tightly bunched in the standings. Merritt held down first place with a 4-1-2 record, followed by the Eagles at 4-2-1, and Napa Valley and Contra Costa each with 3-2-2 records.

The only conference team out of the running was Yuba College who had completed conference play with an 0-7-1 record. But that draw had come against first place Merritt, denying Merritt a win that would likely have wrapped up a conference championship.

The final two conference matches, scheduled on Friday and postponed until Monday, were Mendocino hosting Napa Valley and Merritt hosting Contra Costa.

Wins by the Eagles and Contra Costa would have resulted in the final standings being Mendocino claiming the conference championship with a final conference record of 5-2-1, Merritt and Contra Costa tied for second with 4-2-2 records, Napa Valley fourth at 3-3-2 and Yuba fifth at 0-7-1.

However, that's not the scenario that played out. Instead Napa Valley managed to grab a 2-0 lead at half over the Eagles and stave off a valiant Mendocino comeback effort in the second half to win that match 2-1.

The other match between Merritt and Contra Costa apparently was not played. While poor air quality levels were sufficiently lower on Monday in Ukiah to allow the match there to go forward, poor air quality in the Bay Area remained at higher levels. That may have resulted in the Merritt-Contra match being cancelled.

At any rate, the conference standings at midweek showed Merritt still with a 4-1-2 record and Napa Valley now with a 4-2-2 record, each team with the same number of conference wins and draws. A win earns a team 3 standings points and a draw 1 point, a loss, 0 points.

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So, although their records weren't exactly the same, the two teams, Merritt and Napa, were effectively tied for first place. The Eagles, with a 4-3-1 were in third, Contra fourth place at 3-2-2 and Yuba fifth at 0-7-1.

Normally, a conference champion earns an automatic berth in the state playoffs at the end of the regular season. The rest of the playoff field is determined by power points rankings, a statistical system where teams are ranked not just by wins and losses, but also by factors such factors as strength of schedule.

In the most recent power rankings of the 75 community college men's soccer teams in the state, Napa Valley ranked 25th with a power points ranking of 1.8722.

The rankings of the other Bay Valley Conference teams were: Contra Costa, 36th with a 1.8000; Merritt, 46th with a 1.6806; Mendocino 49th with a 1.6395 and Yuba, 72nd with a 1.3265 power points score.

Thus, although Merritt and Napa Valley tied for first in the BVC final standings, it was Napa who got the nod for playoff selection, having the higher power points ranking of the two teams.

The 2018 CCCAA men's soccer state playoff brackets were announced on Tuesday. In the Northern California Regionals, 16 teams were selected, seeded No 1 to No. 16 in the playoff brackets. Fresno City College (13-1-7) got the No. 1 seed. Los Positas (10-7-3) was the No. 16 seed.

Napa Valley was the only Bay Valley Conference team to be selected. Napa received a No. 15 selection and will play No. 2 West Valley (15-2-2) in the first round of the playoffs to be held this coming Saturday, November 17.

As things turned out, the Eagles' last three matches of their season were against three eventual playoff selectees; No. 6 Butte College, No. 13 Lake Tahoe College and No. 15 Napa Valley College.

Napa's overall regular season record of 7-8-3 may have been a bit deceiving. But they did play their best soccer down the home stretch, going 6-2-2 in the final 10 matches.

That said, one of their 2 losses came at the hands of the Eagles back on October 12 in Napa, Mendocino winning that match 2-1.

Monday's match got off to a bumpy sort of start. It was scheduled for a 1 p.m. start time, but was delayed because the officials assigned to the match had not been notified.

The players, who had gone with their regular warmup routines expecting the 1 p.m. start, had to resort to casually kicking the ball around and doing a few occasional slow sprints and such to stay loose until they waited for the officials to arrive. Any pre-match mental build up also had to be rebooted.

Two officials arrived around 1:30 and it appeared the match would get started. But word came that a third official was on the way. So everyone stood down until he arrived around 1:50. The match finally got underway shortly thereafter.



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And, were it not for a multiple missed scoring opportunities by the Eagles in Monday's match, the Eagles might well have won that second meeting of the two teams, with the discussion instead now being about an Eagles' upcoming playoff match.

In Monday's match the first 26 minutes saw the teams battling back and forth over the first 25 minutes of play, with the Eagles having a slight edge in shots.

But around the 26th minute mark, Napa pressed play into the Eagles half, missing wide to the left of the goal on one shot, but requiring a keeper save on a header attempt closer in shortly thereafter.

Napa cashed in on a third opportunity in little over a minute's span of time, executing an excellent crossing pass from right to left, with a Storm player receiving the pass in the left corner of the penalty area and sending a shot into the right side the Eagles' goal to give Napa Valley a 1-0 lead in the 28th minute of play.

Five minutes later the Eagles got a free kick well out from the goal. The kick was well struck and on target but saved by the Napa keeper.

In the 35th minute, Napa scored again, this time on a fast break opportunity off a long pass and a ball headed into the net over the leaping keeper, making the score 2-0 in Napa Valley's favor.

In the 38th minute, the Eagles were awarded an indirect kick just outside the penalty area. That kick sailed over the goal.

In the closing minutes of the half, it was Napa pressuring and trying to add to their lead, missing another header and then not converting on a long penalty kick.

The half ended with the score still 2-0 Napa, although Napa only had a 7-6 lead in shots in the half.

With their collective backs to the wall, the Eagles looked to catch up and go ahead in the second half. In the 49th minute, a close-in header was snatched by the Napa keeper.

The Eagles continued to force play into Napa's half. In the 57th minute, on an indirect kick from distance to the left of the Napa goal was on target, headed for the left side of the net. But the Napa keeper made a save.

A minute later, the Eagles almost executed a fast break opportunity, a long pass landing in the penalty area just a second before the receiving Eagle could gather it in for a one-on-one opportunity against the Napa keeper, the ball rolling past the goal and out of bounds.

But in the 60th minute, Napa was called for a foul in the penalty area, with the Eagles getting a direct kick from the penalty mark in front of the goal, one-on-one against the keeper.

Taking the kick was Eagles freshman Hector Tuscano, who has been almost automatic with similar kicks earlier in



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the season. Once again, he came through for the Eagles, drilling his shot past the Napa keeper and into the net making the score 2-1.

The Eagles continued to keep the pressure on. In the next 10 minutes of play. Four times they advanced and took shots, a couple on target but saved.

Still trailing in the 85th minute, the Eagles swarmed the Napa goal getting off repeated shot attempts, a couple blocked by Napa defenders and another saved by the keeper.

When the scoreboard clock showed 88 minutes, the official notified the benches that there were 3 minutes left to play.

Having expended a tremendous amount of energy and effort in the half to try catch and pass the Napa Valley on the scoreboard, the Eagles only managed one more offensive push in the time remaining, with the ball going out of bounds and turning over to Napa who was able to run the remaining time off the clock.

In the half, the Eagles had outshot the Storm by a large margin and had a 5-1 edge in corner kicks. The effort was there, but the execution of turning opportunities into score into goals was again lacking.

Thus, the Eagles concluded their season with an overall record of 10-6-3, a vast improvement over the 1- win campaign of the prior season.

With a freshman-heavy roster of 14 freshmen, many of whom saw lots of playing time this season, the Eagles look to have a solid base looking to next season.

Eagles head coach Shane Huff, commenting after the match, said “I bummed that it’s (the season) is over. They’re a wonderful group of young men. It was a tale of two halves today. We did not show up and play well in the first half. Then, in the second half, they played hard, showed what they could do and dominated. Napa had one shot in the second half. We had quite a few, including a sitter in front of the goal and we didn’t finish it.

“I think the kids have improved a lot. They’ve shown some flashes of really great soccer. They did some great stuff in the second half of this match. And they’ve had some great moments this season and some moments where you scratch your head and said, ‘Where did these kids go?’ That’s kind of common with a bunch of young kids. Some of them turned 18 when we were a quarter of the way through our season. So it’s a pretty young group.

“Overall, when you assess the season, when you look at how far we’ve come from where we started, we’ve done pretty well. If everybody stays committed in the class room and stays committed to the program, this team is going to be a really good team and a force to be reckoned with next year.

“I’m pretty proud, pretty happy but disappointed because if we’d won today and Contra beats Merritt, we’d have won the conference. Instead, that didn’t happen. We created a lot of chances today. We just couldn’t finish. But it was a good run. We played for something at the end at the end of the season. That’s what you want. We just fell short.”