

Soccer team reaches second round of playoffs

by | Josh Conner

Running onto the field with his teammates, junior Caleb Beard looked across the field at the visiting Tuscola team, which was coming into the game with only one loss for the season. With playoffs fast approaching, Beard knew his team needed the win to earn a higher seed in the playoffs.

"We started the season as one of the best teams around. We were winning, and nobody wanted to play us," Beard said. "Mid-season, we fell into a slump, losing to bad teams. Then we started playing great again, and we carried that intensity into Tuscola."

With a three-game winning streak on the line, the soccer team played one of their best games of the season by shutting out the Mountaineers, 4-0.

Finishing 15-9 for the season, West entered the state playoffs as a 17th seed. The soccer team played the 16th seed, Concord, in the first round of the playoffs. For much of the game both teams struggled to find offense as the score remained 0-0 at halftime.

Halfway through the second half as the West team made a break for the goal, junior Tyson Hichman crossed the ball to junior Thomas Jones for a goal to break the tie. Jones's goal would be the only one scored as the game ended, 1-0. The Falcons advanced to the second round of the 3A state playoffs for the first time since 2008.

"We fought really hard against Concord. We did not let them get a chance to score on us," Jones said. "It felt great to know I could help out my team, and win the game."

In the second round of the playoffs, West was matched up against the overall first seed, Ashbrook. The soccer team's offense could not match Ashbrook's as the team lost, 4-1, with Jones scoring the only goal for the Falcons.

Head Coach Brian Brewer said he believes if the team had taken advantage of their scoring opportunities they might have had a chance to move on to the third round of the playoffs.

"We had a multitude of opportunities in the first half to score, and they had a pretty good goalkeeper, but he was not the best we had seen this season," Brewer said. "They did not do a lot of things I

would expect a number one seed to do."

When looking back on soccer teams from past seasons, junior Trevor Laffin said he could tell a difference in this year's team not only on the field, but off the field as well. He credited a strong chemistry between the players that helped them perform well.

"This year's team has bonded like no other," Laffin said. "We are really good friends, and we have a lot of fun playing soccer together. We have a lot of great players that work really well together."

The team saw a spark in the offense this season as junior Tyson Hichman returned after spending a year at Carolina Day School. Hichman's scoring ability helped him break West's single season scoring mark with a total of 45 goals for the season, ranking him in the top five in the state and top 20 in the nation.

Hichman said he was glad to be back with his original team and credits his teammates for much of his success on this season.

"I couldn't have done this without the support of my team," Hichman said. "It felt good to be back with the first high school team I was with. They are not only great guys; they are great players, too."

Hichman's play during the season caught the attention of area coaches who selected him to the all-region and all-state teams, according to Brewer.

But Hichman said he does not worry about personal achievement. He focused on the team's success during games.

"Obviously, earning honors like all-region and all-state are a great achievement, but I really just want to be the best player that I can be every time I step on the field to help my team," Hichman said.

With 13 players returning to play next season, the soccer team will look to use their experience to build on this past season's success.

The group of upcoming junior varsity players had a successful season, 10-5-4, that will help build a talented roster next fall.

Brewer said he believes he will be able to fill the spots left by seniors with upcoming players.

"I am replacing them with quality people, and that is what you hope to do in your JV program is develop players who are ready to move into starting roles for the next year," Brewer said.



In a nonconference game against Enka, junior Tyson Hichman dribbles the ball. The team defeated, Enka 6-1. Hichman led the team with 45 goals during the season. "This was the first game that we truly clicked and played together as a team," Hichman said. Photo by Ralph Raesemann