

Rockets State Runner-Up!

Match #23: Bay Rockets vs. Columbus St. Francis DeSales Stallions

Date: Friday, November 13, 2009

Temperature: mid-60's

Skies: partly cloudy

Wind: calm; the perfect day for a soccer match!

Location: Columbus Crew Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Result: Columbus St. Francis DeSales (1) - Bay (0)

This Ohio division II state championship match featured the St. Francis DeSales Stallions, ranked number one in the final state coaches poll, and the Bay Rockets, who were ranked fourth. Both teams came in with one loss and each have had stingy defenses. All season long the Stallions allowed eight goals, and the Rockets had given up nine. It was destined to be a close match for the state crown.

Within the first four minutes of the match, the Stallions had an opportunity from a direct kick that was well-defended by senior goalkeeper Nate McDonald. This was an early indicator that the Rockets would depend on McDonald to keep them in the match. A few minutes later, Bay had a direct kick a few yards outside of the DeSales penalty area. The ball was played short and across to junior Kenan Sayir, but it was quickly taken away by DeSales. Their counterattack featured a four-on-two break which ended with McDonald making a clutch one-on-one save in the box.

Midway through the half DeSales had more possession and more dangerous opportunities in the Bay penalty area. Several times it was junior center back Conner Outcalt who stood in the face of an attacking player to tackle the ball away, and twice it was junior midfielder Alec Petro who cleared the ball to safety after it bounced around in the penalty area.

The Rockets had two good chances as the half wound down. The first came at the nine-minute mark on a corner kick by senior Dan Spiesz. His well-weighted ball glanced off the head of Eric Linhart and went to the far post where it just eluded the reach of Petro before going out on the end line. A few minutes later, senior Shane Williams sent a through ball past the DeSales defenders to junior Jackson Heller. Heller's opportunity to score was thwarted by a nice one-on-one save by the DeSales goalkeeper. The first half ended with the score knotted at zero.

DeSales played the ball consistently well through their midfield, either wide or through the center of the pitch while Bay used their attacking strategy of sending long balls to their forwards. This approach by each team resulted in DeSales garnering more of the possession and creating more of the scoring chances.

In the first fifteen minutes of the second half Bay, was forced to defend. The Rockets marking backs, Sayir and junior Tony Passalcqua made it difficult for DeSales to get the ball into the danger area in the middle of the pitch. The times they did, McDonald was

there to stop them cold. He made a nice save on a low-hard shot they came after a rebound on a direct kick. He made a diving save on a long shot from outside the penalty area. And, he pushed a ball over the goal on a shot that was volleyed from close range.

The deciding play of the match came with seventeen minutes to play, as a DeSales attacker broke free after a nice first touch, side-stepped Bay's defense, and shot wide of a diving McDonald to give the Stallions a lead that would stand-up for the win.

The Rockets had a couple of direct kicks in the last fifteen minutes, but none came close to scoring. The final opportunity came as Petro slotted a ball through the DeSales defenders into the path of Heller, who was holding off a defender just inside the penalty area. His shot inside the penalty area was quickly closed down by the DeSales goalkeeper, who made a tough play coming off his line to make the save. The final score was DeSales 1, Bay 0.

The Rockets held their heads high in defeat, as they received their state runner-up medals. They represented their high school, their families, and their community with great commitment, outstanding effort, and genuine class not only this day, but all season long. 200 teams played in the Ohio Division II State Tournament and only two get the the championship.

Summary: Your soccer family, friends and fans are so very proud of you for creating memories that will last a lifetime. You've added your legacy to the rich history of the Band of Brothers, as only five teams in 40 years have reached the championship match. All of you are young men that future soccer players kicking the ball around Cahoon Park on Saturday mornings, like you did, will be trying to emulate. There's a lot to celebrate about this year's team:

- Our senior captains Joey Kinkelaar, Nate McDonald and Shane Williams were complete leaders, on and off the field. They set an example that future captains will find challenging to perform to.
- The team had fifteen shutouts and only gave up 10 goals all season.
- Several quality wins stand above the rest including two against Revere, who ended the season ranked #5 in the state coaches poll. The opening match of the season started with a 3-0 shutout against Chagrin Falls at their field. They finished the season ranked ahead of the Rockets at #3 in the state coaches poll. The tie against DeSales, ranked #1 in the state coaches poll, gave the team a sense for how well they could defend under pressure. The 5-0 win against Westlake at their field in the Dover Cup match gave the team momentum heading into the playoffs after the loss to Avon. The thriller against Rocky River in the district final was a turning point in the playoff run. They were down one with ten minutes to go, then came back to win in regulation time with two goals in the last nine minutes. That created a sense of destiny, at least in retrospect. Then, who will be able to forget the shootout victory against Lake Catholic in the state semi-final match. How cool, calm and collected were our PK takers? Dan Spiesz, Kenan Sayir, Tony Passalcqua and Eric Linhart were absolutely clutch, while

McDonald was able to raise his level of play between the pipes to a new, higher level.

- The state final in Crew Stadium didn't end the way everyone, who is a part of the Rockets family, would have wanted. However, the way the Bay Rockets soccer program displayed itself on the brightest stage in our state starting with our coaches and players to the administration to the families and fans, was first class with great sportsmanship and genuine respect for the game itself.
- Nate McDonald said it best when he was quoted in the Plain Dealer as saying, "There's nothing better than playing in Columbus Crew Stadium for a state title, even if we did lose."

At the end, what more can be said besides...Who-Ha!