

Boys soccer: Palm Harbor University 2, Wiregrass Ranch 1 (OT)



Kelly Parsons, Times Staff Writer

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TAMPA — From the start of Friday's Class 5A, District 7 championship between Wiregrass Ranch and Palm Harbor University, the Bulls had chance after chance thanks to several throw-ins near the goal.

But the Hurricanes didn't waver — neither then, nor even after Wiregrass Ranch scored the first goal of the game in the 42nd minute.

Because if any team knows how to claw its way back in, coach Shaun Falcon said, it's PHU.

"They've been down, and they've come back and scored, so for them, to be down is not anything foreign," Falcon said. "They've never panicked. They've just said, 'Hey, we have the skill and ability to get back into it.' "

And the Hurricanes wasted no time doing just that.

Just one minute after Fernando Alicea scored for the Bulls the second half, senior Sergio Enciso scored on a free kick to tie it up. That tie remained through the end of regulation and a first overtime until Enciso struck again, assisting Edin Hernandez on the winning golden goal with four minutes to play, handing the Hurricanes a 2-1 victory and a district championship.

"I mean, me and my friend Serg, we were planning on it. We said, 'That's the right moment,' " Hernandez said of the winner. "We looked in each other's eyes, and we knew it was it."

The first time PHU (9-6-2) and Wiregrass Ranch (20-2-3) met this season, the game ended in a 1-1 tie. And throughout the first half of Friday's rematch, it appeared the second game would play out in a similar fashion. While Wiregrass Ranch had its chances early, the PHU defense staved off the attack.

After the early goals in the second half, it was more back and forth until the final minute of regulation, when Wiregrass Ranch had a shot that went just over the cross bar and another near goal after a throw in.

When golden-goal overtime began, Falcon challenged his team to score in the first 10-minute period, while the wind was working in the Hurricanes' favor.

It took them a little longer than that, but less than five minutes from what would have been decisive penalty kicks, Enciso's big leg delivered for PHU once again on his corner kick turned assist.

"All season (he's done it). He's been our heart and soul," Falcon said. "He's a quiet guy who works hard and leads by example. He's an irreplaceable guy."

During the course of the season, Palm Harbor University took its lumps, losing five games by just one goal and earning the fifth seed out of six teams in the tough 5A-7 tournament. But in the end, it was those very failures,

Hernandez said, that put the Hurricanes back on the right path.

"We just had to leave everything in the past," he said, "and keep our eyes on the future."

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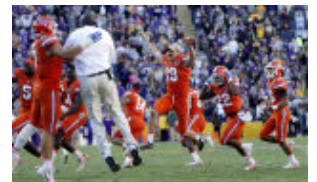
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