

Lions sneak into playoffs, fall in play-in game

By Zach Silva
zsilva@cgsentinel.com

The Cottage Grove boys' soccer team was searching for a victory.

"We needed to win this game for many reasons. One, because it's senior night and two, it would ease our way into playoffs. And it was Marist," said Cottage Grove's George Cervantes who netted the only goal of the game. "What better way to go out then to beat the undefeated (in league-play) team? They're not undefeated anymore."

Behind Cervantes' 46th minute stunner of a goal, the Lions (7-5-2) defeated the Spartans (9-3-1) 1-0 at home last Tuesday night to grab the final playoff spot in the 4A classification.

Entering Tuesday's contest, Cottage Grove was ranked 21st with the top 20 teams making the playoffs this year. Twelve playoff spots go to the first and second place team in each of the six leagues while the final eight spots go to the highest-ranking teams remaining. On the outside looking in, the Lions knew what they had to do.

"We were really level-headed coming in because we had been talking about this game for a long time. We all knew we needed to give it everything we have,"

said Cottage Grove senior Jasper Nichols-Ferguson. "There's a lot of energy - there's so much energy in the locker room. Like a quiet energy, like a calm before a storm kind of energy."

Going into the game, the Spartans had outscored their Sky-Em opponents 28-1 on the season. With Marist's ability to pick apart a defense with their precision passing, it was the Cottage Grove defense that came up big on the night.

"It's better for us to just be in the position, to make sure that we're shutting them down. They can pass it all day long and control it all day long as long as we don't let it go in our defensive third of the field," said Cottage Grove head coach Vern Stewart. "And they were just getting frustrated."

In the first half, the Spartans were able to get onto the Cottage Grove half but were unable to create meaningful opportunities. The Lions had chances including a header from Nichols-Ferguson that just went wide halfway through the first half.

Six minutes into the second half the Lions were able to capitalize as Cervantes hit a strike from 25-yards out on the left side of the field. The ball curved up before nestling into the top right corner of the goal.



Cottage Grove's Abelio Carillo-Chales passes to a teammate against Marist last week.

"I was like alone, I was like, 'Yo, drop the ball.' And (Lathan Van Wagner) dropped the ball and I had so much space. I had time to take a touch, look up, find the angle. Because usually against Marist you don't really have time because they're always like on you," said Cervantes.

"I just had all the time in the world. So I was just like - easy shot."

Over the course of the final half hour, and especially in the final 10 minutes of the game, Marist was searching for the goal and controlled possession but they were continuously

plagued by the Cottage Grove defense.

"We just wanted to make sure that everybody got behind the ball. So we practiced all week about everybody getting back, even our forwards and everybody before we did anything up front," said Stewart.

It worked for the Lions as they recorded their third-straight shutout and fifth in the last seven games.

Last Saturday, the Lions travelled to McLoughlin where they lost 1-0 to the eighth-ranked Pioneers in a play-in game.

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6 p.m. Girls Soccer @ Hidden Valley

11/2

3:15 p.m. Volleyball vs. Tillamook
(@ Forest Grove, Court One)
7 p.m. Football @ Gladstone

11/3

12:20 p.m. Cross Country

NORTH DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL

11/2

8 a.m. Volleyball vs. Days Creek (@ Redmond, Court Two)

1 p.m. Football @ Crane

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ELKTON HIGH SCHOOL

11/3

2 p.m. Football @ Camas Valley

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3
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UCLA @ Oregon 4:30 PM
Stanford @ Washington 6:00 PM
USC @ Oregon State 7:00 PM
California @ Washington State 7:45 PM