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EMU?Blanks BC

Teams To Meet In Tournament

MATTHEW STOSS, Daily News-Record

BRIDGEWATER - Tuesday's 2-0 loss to rival Eastern Mennonite University wasn't, by their coach's estimation, an especially exceptional showing by the Bridgewater College men's soccer team.

In previous years, it would have been a performance representative of the season.

Not this year.

Despite Tuesday's blip, the Eagles are going to the Old Dominion Athletic Conference tournament for the first time since 2006, ending a four-season drought in which BC went just 12-53-6 overall and 4-30-5 in league play.

"We just came in and started a new standard of work ethic," said first-year Bridgewater coach Ryan Bennison, hired after spending three years as the top assistant at his alma mater, Division III Anderson University (Ind.). "I think that's just made it a totally different type of game to them because I don't think they were ever pushed to a level that we're trying to push them. ... We're not quite there. We're still seeing shades of where we've been, but, at the end of the day, I think we're definitely taking a step forward still, and I think days like [Tuesday] are part of the process."

The Eagles (7-10-1, 4-5-1) will be the seventh seed in the eight-team ODAC conference and face second-seeded Eastern Mennonite (9-7-1, 7-2-1) on Saturday in Park View. The time is to-be-determined, but the Royals anticipate BC will be ready to go - especially considering the past four years that include going 0-9-1 in the conference in 2009.

"I think, if anything, it will give them more energy," EMU senior forward Mitchell Leap said. "Tournament is a whole different season. It's win or you're done. It really picks up the intensity of the game, and you know you have to give everything inside of you because it might be the last time you step on the field."

Leap led the Royals on Tuesday, scoring off a corner kick by junior back Jared Ross to give EMU a 2-0 lead and room to breath in the 60th minute. Leap headed the ball in from the far post for his 10th goal of the season. It tied the Eastern Mennonite High School graduate with Guilford's Freddy Gomez and Randolph-Macon's Corey Sindle for the ODAC lead.

"It wasn't a drawn-up play or anything," said Leap, who also scored in the 45th minute but had it negated by an off-sides call. "I started near-post and I saw as soon as he kicked it, I thought it was going far-post, so I kind of looped my run back around and, luckily, everybody overran the ball and then I was alone on the back post. It was a great ball by Jared."

Eastern Mennonite scored its first goal in the 41st minute when freshman midfielder Mark Mast scored from about 18 yards out. Mast, son of EMU coach Roger Mast, put the ball past diving BC keeper Travis Morris on the right side for the first goal of his college career.

"I got the ball about the 18, and I just turned," Mark Mast said. "I had plenty of time, and they didn't pressure me. I was actually kind of surprised by how much time, and I just looked up and put it past the keeper."

Bridgewater had opportunities to score, taking six shots on goal (EMU also had six), but either missed or got called for being off-sides.

Ten minutes into the first half, sophomore forward Sawyer Janes had one of the Eagles' best chances but was wide right on a point-blank shot at an open net. In the second half, BC was undone by a bunch of off-sides calls - most of which came in the final stretch. Some were questionable, though.

"I've never seen off-sides called that many times. However, the referee is a good referee and he knows what he's doing," Bennison said. "And I couldn't really see the angle, but, usually, if they're calling that many off-sides than that

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normally means it's just a discipline thing on our part. I don't think they were pulling a trap or doing anything special; our guys just got caught watching the ball and moving north and south and, obviously, we're going to be out of position at that point in time."

Halftime score: EMU 1-0

Shots on goal: EMU 6; BC 6

Corner kicks: EMU 3; BC 0

Saves: EMU (Yoder) 6; BC (Morris) 4

Scoring: EMU-Mast 40:51, Leap (Ross) 59:11.

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