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Pirates reach playoffs despite loss

By John Gunther, Sports Editor

COOS BAY — Marshfield's boys soccer team lost on the pitch but won in the standings Wednesday.

Thurston beat the host Pirates 4-1 in their Midwestern League match. But earlier in the evening, Churchill beat North Eugene 2-0, clinching third place and a spot in the playoffs for Marshfield.

In the waning moments of the game, Marshfield athletic director Greg Mulkey announced the Churchill score over the public address system at Pete Susick Stadium and instantly the players raised their arms and the fans in the grandstands sent up a loud cheer.

"I'm so excited," said Gatlon Giorgis, one of Marshfield's captains. "Coming from not winning a game last year to making the playoffs — it's huge."

Marshfield last made the playoffs in 1998, when the Pirates had a first-round bye and then lost a 5-4 heartbreaker in overtime to Barlow in the second round. The current players were in elementary school then.

Exchange student Eike Behrens, who scored the goal for the Pirates, joined his teammates in celebrating the accomplishment Wednesday.

"I think it's really exciting," Behrens said.

The joy of the postseason overcame the disappointment with the match Wednesday, which Thurston won with a pair of goals in each half.

"They're a good team and they deserved to win," Giorgis said.

The teams played even for the first 20 minutes, before Thurston started to take control.

Thurston's first goal caught Marshfield by surprise. After a foul by the Pirates, the Colts started to line up a direct kick from 40 yards out. But instead of kicking toward the goal, a Thurston player passed the ball quickly to Gustavo Machucha on the left wing and he blasted a shot into the back of the net before

Marshfield had a chance to set up a defense.

The second goal came just before halftime, after a Marshfield foul deep in Thurston's end of the field. A Thurston player kicked the ball across midfield and it took a high bounce. Before any Marshfield defenders could control it, Thurston's Lucas Montes got it and dribbled through the Pirates' back line before easily beating goalkeeper Zaq Jones.

"The first two goals were rookie mistakes," Marshfield coach Tony Preston said. "The first goal was intelligent on their part."

Thurston coach Ryan Christner said the two first-half goals were a big boost for his squad.

"Early goals are super huge," he said, adding that the lead helped settle his team's defense down.

Marshfield had a number of good chances early, including a header by Chad Statham on a corner kick that Thurston goalkeeper Calvin Green corralled and a header by Giorgis on a long direct kick that missed the goal just wide.

In the second half, the chances were few for Marshfield.

Meanwhile, the Colts kept up the attack.

In the 52nd minute, Ramon Gordillo scored when he controlled a loose ball 10 yards out from the goal and battled through several Pirates before sending a kick past Jones. Gordillo scored again in the 75th minute on a long direct kick after a Marshfield foul.

The Pirates' score came in the 69th minute, when Behrens lined up a direct kick from 25 yards out on the left wing and curved it over Thurston's wall of defenders and past Green into the upper corner of the net.

Giorgis described it as a perfect shot, while Behrens was thrilled with the score.

"I've never shot a goal like that before," he said.

In the end, both teams had a lot to celebrate.

While Marshfield will be in the playoffs, the Colts clinched at least a share of the league title and the top seed for the playoffs with one match remaining.

"We're excited," Christner said, though he added the players were a little disappointed the Pirates scored.

"We were looking for a shutout to keep the momentum going," he said.

Thurston improved to 8-0-1, while Marshfield fell to 5-4.

"We played good, but they were better," Behrens said. "I know we have to step up and give our best (in the playoffs)."

Preston said the Pirates would have loved a win Wednesday, but they're thrilled with the playoff berth.

"We wanted to be in the driver's seat," he said of the chance to secure a playoff spot with a win. "But we played an excellent Thurston team."

As for the playoffs, Preston said, "I'm excited for my guys — they earned it."

Marshfield finishes the regular season next Wednesday at Churchill.

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