

HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER NOTEBOOK

Around the globe most soccer clubs participate in numerous competitions during their yearly campaigns, usually the standard league season where the team with the best overall points total wins the trophy and various knockout Cups where David can conceivably slay Goliath in a one-off match.

In that context, the upcoming regional high school soccer league playoffs have a bit of a Cup feel to them. The unifying theme around the region and across the leagues is that any team who qualifies for the playoffs has a shot.

"It's anyone's game," St. Joseph girls coach Jack Nogueira said earlier this week.

Nogueira should know. His Cadets are the defending FCIAC champions. However to Nogueira, and others, the league is more open than it's been in the past. Last year, for instance, St. Joseph would have been considered the prohibitive favorite with only one loss — which it avenged in the championship game by defeating Darien — heading into the tournament. And Darien, with a bulk of its team back from last year, didn't even finish in the top eight to make the playoffs.

This year the top of the league is as strong as ever with New Canaan, Ridgefield and Westhill, each with only one loss, leading the way. But there isn't a clear-cut favorite. St. Joseph, even with its talented duo of Jess Schloth and Sarah Frassetto, only earned the No. 5 seed and will play at No. 4 Greenwich Saturday morning.

The FCIAC boys continually praise themselves for having one of the toughest leagues in the state.

Staples — the prohibitive favorite, No. 1 seed and defending champion — found this out on Wednesday, losing to an upstart Central 2-0 at Kennedy Stadium for its only blemish on its league record.

So it's not just lip service when Wreckers coach Dan Woog

says the playoffs are "wide open."

Staples gets No. 8 Westhill, which had to forfeit four games in the midseason, today while most of the other quarterfinals will be pushed until Saturday due to weather cancellations earlier this week.

One team to consider is a rapidly improving Trumbull outfit, which had won eight straight until losing to Ridgefield Thursday night 1-0. As a result the Tigers moved to the No. 2 seed and the Eagles dropped to No. 5 and will play at No. 4 Greenwich today at 3:30.

Early in the season the Eagles were hit by injuries, but seem to have found their stride. Helping their cause is the emergence of Italian transfer student Marco LeCroix, along with a healthy Mike Matera, who was beset by back spasms earlier in the season.

"Once you're healthy you can create things," Trumbull coach Sebe Gangemi said.

In the SWC girls playoffs, which begin this afternoon, three-time defending league champion Masuk opens play in an unfamiliar position, yet against a familiar foe.

The third-seeded Panthers, for a change, won't enter the tournament as favorites. They'll also host long-time rival Newtown in a rematch of last year's SWC final.

"It's been an interesting season," coach Eleanor Brainard said. "We're starting to play well as a team after all the ups-and-downs."

Since the fourth game of the season the Panthers have played without all-New England midfielder Jackie McSally, who sprained her ankle in Sept. 24 win over Oxford. Her status for the playoffs is uncertain, but Brainard thinks she might be able to play limited minutes, if not today, then later in the tournament should the Panthers advance.

"As much as I hate to say it, we had to move beyond it," she said.

In McSally's absence players like Amanda Snajder and Ashley KcKeown have stepped up their games.

Like Nogueira in the FCIAC, Brainard feels the SWC tournament, even with strong teams like Lauralton Hall and Barlow, is wide open.

"I truly belief it's anyone's ballgame out there," she said. "Our league is a kind weird this year. It's had a different feel to it."

Unlike the girls, the SWC boys tournament seems a little more top-heavy, with three streaking teams — New Milford, Brookfield and Barlow — leading the charge.

The top-seeded Green Wave enter the postseason with eight straight wins. The Bobcats, who were one of the preseason favorites in the state, rallied from a slow start to earn the No. 2 seed, while the Falcons, too, started slow and picked up momentum and haven't lost since Sept. 24. Defending champion Barlow has outscored opponents 34-5 over that span.

"I feel like any of the six teams could win it," said Brian Humpal, coach of No. 4 Masuk. "But New Milford and Brookfield and Barlow are the three favorites. Nobody would be shocked if they won."

Playoff matchups

Boys FCIAC

No. 8 Westhill at No. 1 Staples, Friday 3

No. 7 Stamford at No. 2 Ridgefield, Saturday, 1:30

No. 6 Norwalk at No. 3 Central, Saturday, 3:30

No. 5 Trumbull at No. 4 Greenwich, Friday 3:30

SWC

No. 8 Bunnell at No. 1 New Milford,

Friday 3:45

No. 7 Pomperaug at No. 2 Brookfield, Friday 3:45

No. 6 Newtown at No. 3 Barlow, Saturday 9:30 a.m.

No. 5 New Fairfield at No. 4 Masuk, Saturday 1 p.m.

Girls FCIAC

No. 8 Staples at No. 1 Ridgefield, TBA

No. 7 Fairfield Warde at No. 2 New Canaan, Saturday, TBA

No. 6 Fairfield Ludlowe at No. 3 Westhill, Saturday, TBA

No. 5 St. Joseph at No. 4 Greenwich, Saturday 11

SWC

No. 8 Weston at No. 1 Lauralton Hall, Friday 3:45 p.m.

No. 7 Bethel at No. 2 Barlow, Friday 3:30 p.m.

No. 6 Newtown at No. 3 Masuk, Friday, 4 p.m.

No. 5 Pomperaug at No. 4 Immaculate, Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

SCC

Hand at Mercy, Tuesday, TBA

Cheshire at Wilbur Cross, at Yale, Tuesday 6

Week's Best

Boys

MIKEY FITZGERALD, Staples — Scored twice in a 3-0 win over Fairfield Warde.

RECO MCCLAREN, Central — Scored three goals with an assist in a win over McMahon.

ANDRES TORRES, Norwalk — Scored three goals with an assist in a 4-4 draw with Greenwich.

PAUL KUCZO, St. Joseph — Made eight saves in a 2-0 win over Westhill.

Girls

DANICA FOGGIO, Shelton — Scored twice with an assist in a 6-0 win over Sheehan.

JESS SCHLOTH, St. Joseph — Scored with two assists in a 3-0 win over Fairfield Ludlowe.

—MIKE CARDILLO