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Sports NEWS

Bethel boys soccer topple Barlow in key early season showdown

*By Dan Farrand
Staff Writer*

REDDING -- In just three minutes and 11 seconds, Donny Walsh and the Bethel High boys soccer team delivered a message to Joel Barlow and the rest of the South-West Conference.

They, not the Falcons, are the team to beat this year in the SWC.

"We knew we had a chance to make a statement," Walsh said after the Wildcats defeated the Falcons 3-2 at Joel Barlow High School in both teams' conference openers on Monday.

"We haven't paid much attention to what is being said in the paper. We know with this group we can beat anyone."

Walsh made that obvious when he netted the game's first goal just over three minutes into the game. After Ben Eaton's shot hit the post, Walsh corralled the rebound and quickly fired a laser from the left corner of the penalty box.

And Joel Barlow goalkeeper Cody Hickok could do nothing but watch as the rocket shot sailed into the top right corner.

"I was surprised when the ball came off my boot," Walsh, who has scored five goals in three games, said. "I never hit shots like that."

But as Bethel celebrated its early score, Joel Barlow reminded the Wildcats why they were SWC and Class M runners-up last season.

Less than two minutes after Walsh's score, Mike Flynn beat Bethel goalkeeper Chris Greeney with a grounder to the low left corner to knot the game at 1-1.

Flynn was wide open at the top of the box after Barlow's Scott St. Cyr drew the Bethel defense to the right and delivered a perfect cross pass.

"When we put pressure on them we saw success," Joel Barlow coach Paul Winstanley said. "The problem was we didn't do that consistently and we allowed them to dominate us physically."

Basically, Winstanley said, the Wildcats wanted it more.

The second half was proof enough of that as Bethel again raced out of the gate.

The Wildcats constantly pressed the Barlow defense and made it difficult for the Falcons' midfielders to control the ball.

And Bethel's aggressive play paid dividends.

Just four minutes into the second half, Wildcat fullback Gabe Jimenez sent a ball deep to forward Liam McCormick. The send caught the Barlow defense out of position and forced Hickok out of the net to play the ball.

Hickok effectively headed the ball clear, but it was quickly controlled by Bethel's Sueng Woo Lee, who lofted it into the net from 40 yards out over Hickok as he attempted to scramble back into the net.

"Nothing surprises me with Sueng anymore," Walsh said of Lee's impressive goal, which gave Bethel a 2-1 lead. "He is an amazing player."

Barlow would have its chances to even the score in the next 10 minutes, especially after the Wildcats' starting fullback Dan Kraver and forward Mike Parenti were sent off with yellow cards.

The Falcons, however, failed to generate effective chances as Bethel continued to attack the Barlow net.

"Our defense has been phenomenal this season," Fernandes said. "We have given up only two goals in three games and they have also done a great job getting the ball forward to our offense."

The Falcons' offense was hampered by the noticeable absence of All-SWC midfielder Dylan Stone, who was taken out midway through the second half and did not return. He was also not present at the Falcons' meeting after the game. Winstanley chose not to comment on the why Stone missed most of the second half.

And while the Bethel defense continued to stymie Barlow, the Wildcats' added some insurance.

McCormick pushed the Bethel lead to 3-1 with a goal off a near-perfect long ball from Dan Amarillo, who had replaced Parenti after he received his yellow card.

Barlow responded late as Sean Basak-Smith made a nice move and was taken down in the goal box. Flynn netted the ensuing penalty kick, but it was too little too late for Barlow (1-1-1, 0-1-0).

"We were exceptionally soft mentally," Winstanley told his team after the game. "I'm not disappointed with how we played physically. We fought for everything, but we still lost. Now we've got to respond."

Senior-laden Bethel (3-0-0, 1-0-0), meanwhile, is hoping to keep fine-tuning its game for a potential championship run.

"This was absolutely a statement game for us," Fernandes said. "Now we have to build off this."

NOTES: Bethel's All-State midfielder Ryan Rose dressed, but did not play in the game because of an ankle injury he suffered in a preseason scrimmage against Westhill. Fernandes said he may play on Thursday when the Wildcats play host to Masuk" Since Winstanley took over at Barlow four years ago, the visiting team has won the Bethel/Barlow game each year" The last time Bethel beat Barlow (2005), the Falcons defeated the Wildcats in the SWC playoffs and won the conference title" Until Monday, Barlow was the only team Fernandes had yet to beat in his coaching career" The two teams combined for 35 foul calls and five yellow cards (two for Bethel, three for Barlow)" If a team receives 16 or more yellow cards a season, they are not eligible for the postseason" Fernandes' team last year, Brookfield, had 15 yellow cards at the end of last season" Barlow will play at Kolbe Cathedral on Thursday.

Bethel (3-0-0, 1-0-0) 1 2 "" 3
Joel Barlow (1-1-1, 0-1-0) 1 1 "" 2

SCORING: 1. B, Donny Walsh 3:11; 2. JB, Mike Flynn (Scott St. Cyr) 4:49; 3. B, Sueng Woo Lee 43:58; 4. B, Liam McCormick (Dan Amarillo) 59:58; 5. JB, Flynn (PK) 75:21.
SHOTS: Bethel 10, Joel Barlow 8. SAVES: Chris Greeney (B) 3; Cody Hickok (JB) 1. CORNER KICKS: Bethel 4, Joel Barlow 3.