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Brookfield, Barlow share title

Boys soccer teams play to tie in Class L state title game, declared co-champions
By Dan Farrand Staff Writer

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SOUTHBURY -- As discouraged and exhausted players fell to the turf at Pomperaug High School, it was hard to tell any team won a championship Monday night, let alone two.



But that's exactly what happened as Joel Barlow and Brookfield were declared the Class L co-champions after the two teams battled to a 1-1 tie in the Class L state title bout in front of an overflowing crowd on a frigid November night.

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But although both teams walked away champions Monday night, there was clearly a winner and loser.

"This certainly feels like a loss," Barlow senior captain Scott St. Cyr said after the game. "Our motto all postseason has been to win everything and we didn't accomplish that (Monday)."

The sour taste left in the Falcons' mouth will likely linger as Barlow realizes how close they actually came to being the outright state champions.

Barlow (16-2-4) completely dominated the game for nearly all 100 minutes, limiting the Bobcats (14-6-1) to just three shots while taking 17 themselves.

The ultimate problem: Brookfield managed to put one in.

The Bobcats got on the board first as A.J. Stueck fired home a header from Mike Shaker with 11:13 left in the first half.

Shaker set up the score by redirecting a Luke Niarhos free kick just as Barlow goalkeeper Cody Hickok came out to play the deep ball.

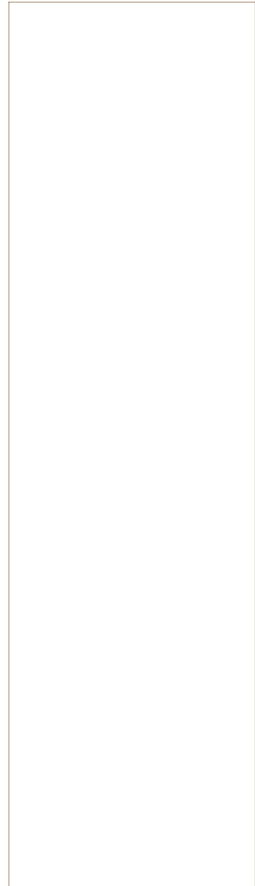
The ball snuck just past Hickok and two Barlow defenders and found its way right to a streaking Stueck, who fired it home.

The score was the Bobcats' lone shot of the

first half.

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"I told the guys before the game that if we brought our 'A' game we were going to win and if we brought our 'B' game we'd be in for a dogfight," Barlow coach



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Paul Winstanley said. "We got the dogfight."

But Barlow, which rallied from a 1-0 deficit against Wethersfield in the state semifinals, was quick to respond in the second half.

Less than seven minutes into the second session, senior Chris Naber found the top right corner of the Brookfield net off a perfect 20-yard throw-in from classmate Mike Flynn.

That marked the last goal of the game, but it was merely the beginning of the Barlow onslaught.

The Falcons peppered the Bobcat net with shots for the rest of the second half and both overtimes.

Barlow's best scoring chance came in the first overtime, when Dylan Stone fired a bending shot on net less than two minutes into the extra session.

The senior captain's shot was blocked by a diving Matt Bonn and bounced right to Barlow's Alex Pelzar, who was alone in front of the open net.

The junior, however, chip the ball off the side of his foot and the ball trickled along the goal line before going just wide.

"We should have won," St. Cyr said. "We had so many chances and just couldn't finish. But you have to give Brookfield's defense credit for that."

Every time the Falcons' challenged the Brookfield net, Matt Bonn and the Brookfield defense proved up to the challenge.

Bonn made another amazing diving save in the second overtime when Stone fired a cross to St. Cyr, who headed it toward the far right post.

Brookfield's sophomore keeper, however, came flying across the box and swallowed up the potential game-winning shot.

"Most guys try to go far post with a header, so I kind of guessed and got a good jump on it," said Bonn, who was named the game's co-MVP along with Stone. "I knew at that point we were playing for the co-championship and I had to make that save."

Bonn's heroics were a repeat of the first time the two teams met on Oct. 2.

The Brookfield keeper made two diving saves to deny a Barlow team that dominated the game.

It was also the last loss Barlow suffered as the Falcons had won nine straight games before Monday and finished the season 13-0-3.

Barlow did get revenge, topping Brookfield in the quarterfinals of the SWC tournament, making Monday's tie a predictable end.

But it certainly wasn't a satisfying one, at least not for Barlow.

While Brookfield awaited a police escort home to Brookfield, there was little such fanfare for the Falcons.

"(Former Barlow coach) Jim Dolan set a different standard for Barlow," said Winstanley as he held the championship trophy as his side. "The expectation and the attitude is different. We are suppose to be here and we are suppose to win."

The Falcons did just that this season winning their first state title since 2001 and claiming both the South-West Conference and state crowns for the first time since 1998.

Stone and St. Cyr led the crew, combining to tally 24 goals and 39 assists.

"This is the way you want to go out," Stone, a senior captain, said. "This is not exactly the way we all wanted to do it, but I know we will look back on this and be proud of ourselves."

Brookfield, meanwhile, is looking forward to the future.

The Bobcats have 14 players returning next year, but will be losing three seniors that made a stout defense in John Smith, Steve Rountos and Mike Huttemann.

But right now Brookfield's first-year coach Jared Sheikh is ready to celebrate.

"Co-champs is better than no-champs," said Sheikh, who won a state title as the coach of Nonnewaug in 2002. "I'm just so proud of these guys. We will have some holes to fill, but there is not limit to where this group can go."

Joel Barlow (16-2-4) ",,,"",,"%0 1 0 0 "" 1

Brookfield (14-6-1) ",,,"",,"%o"%o"%o"%o1 0 0 0 "" 1

SCORING: 1. B, A.J. Stueck (Mike Shaker) 28:47; 2. JB, Chris Naber (Mike Flynn) 46:58.

SHOTS: Joel Barlow: 17; Brookfield: 3. SAVES: Cody Hickok (JB) 0; Matt Bonn (B) 6. CORNER KICKS: Joel Barlow: 3; Brookfield: 0.

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