

Despite adversity, Airline boys soccer team has lived up to expectations

Written by Sean Green

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Living up to expectations is usually difficult, sometimes bordering on the impossible.

But the Airline boys soccer team is unusual.

The Vikings clinched a share of the District 1, Division I boys soccer championship with a 3-1 victory over Caddo Magnet Tuesday night. The win avenged a rare loss on Dec. 10. More importantly, it improved their district record to 10-1 and 24-2 overall.

Bigger still, they can take the title outright with a win over Parkway Monday at Tinsley Park. Considering they've spent most of the season without one of their best players, attacking midfielder Patrick Laurent who broke his leg in the 1-0 loss to Caddo Magnet back in December, the title is no small feat.

Coming into a season where you're expected to not only make the playoffs, but make a serious run deep into them, winning district is a given. But having to do that without a player who racked up so many goals that he was the team and northwest Louisiana's top scorer in only half a season's work, is almost impossible.

Most teams would have buckled under the weight of expectations and scapegoated the collapse on the loss of such an important player.

Again, Airline isn't most teams.

Along with district, they've also won their own tournament, the Viking Winter Classic, and the Bossier tournament. And they have the scalp of the nation's No. 6 team when they beat Lafayette in a tournament game in early November.

They have hammered their opposition all season, scoring 117 goals in all competitions and only giving up 9. That is an absolutely bananas goal differential of +108. Until their first loss, and their only one in district, they had outscored their opponents 36-0.

It's no wonder when you look at a side laden with seniors who have spent years playing together. They are a battle hardened unit with the confidence in each other to know that someone will step up.

And players have done just that — Matt Hanisee has put on his scoring boots in the absence of Laurent to become the leading scorer with 23 goals. Chris Galvin has become a creative force with 19 assists (making him second in the area) and 21 goals.

The list of this season's achievements is justifying hopes that had risen long before the first ball was even kicked, going back to last season when Airline finished 16th in the state, made their first playoff trip in six years, and hosted their first home playoff game in history.

It has given belief to the goal of not only repeating the history making campaign of 2011-12, but taking huge steps forward, ultimately culminating in a state title in 2013.

And what they did Tuesday could be the first step towards achieving all those lofty expectations. And there's nothing about this team that says they won't finish what they've started.

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