

Airline seeks berth in soccer semifinals

Written by Russell Hedges

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The Airline Vikings have already enjoyed more success than any boys soccer team in school history.

For the first time, Airline has reached the quarterfinals of the Division I playoffs.

But to keep the season going, the Vikings will have to knock off one of the state's traditional powerhouses.

Airline (27-2), the No. 7 seed, travels to the New Orleans suburb of Metairie Tuesday for a 4:30 p.m. quarterfinal game against No. 2 seed Jesuit (17-3-1) at John Ryan Stadium.

Since 1987, when the LHSAA first sanctioned soccer as a sport, Jesuit has won nine state championships.

The most recent came last year.

Two of the Blue Jays' three losses this season were against district rival Brother Martin, 3-1 and 1-0.

Brother Martin is still alive in the playoffs and faces Catholic-Baton Rouge in the quarterfinals.

The winner meets the Airline-Jesuit winner in the semifinals.

Jesuit defeated Airline's District 1 rival Caddo Magnet 3-0 in the second round after routing Natchitoches Central 11-0 in the first.

Airline defeated Ruston 1-0 in the first round and Sulphur 2-1 in the second.

After the win over Sulphur, Airline coach Sarah Yarina said she obviously expects a challenge but has confidence in her team.

"One game at a time," she said. "That's how we've been all year long. I feel like if that group comes out and plays their best soccer we can beat anyone."

Airline's only two losses this season have come against No. 1 seed Lafayette 2-0 and Caddo Magnet 1-0.

Airline also handed Lafayette its only loss of the season 2-1.

Matt Hanisee leads Airline with 25 goals. Chris Galvin is the team's assist leader with 21. He has also scored 22 goals.

But Yarina has stressed all season that the Vikings' success hasn't been because of one or two players.

Other players who have made major contributions include midfielders Scott Bowers, Esteban Guevara and Will Coyer; and defenders Abdullah Rayyan, Matt Henry, Gabe Rodriguez and Jordan Gaudet.

Goalkeeper Collin Jimes has recorded 20 shutouts and allowed only 11 goals all season.

Patrick Laurent was the team's leading scorer until suffering a broken leg in a Dec. 10 game against Caddo Magnet.

He has since been an inspiration to the team.