

De La Salle hands Cavaliers 2-1 loss

Luke Johnson leads the Knights to the state semifinals

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Statesman Journal

November 10, 2004

Freddy Adu, the 15-year-old rookie for D.C. United, will be playing in Sunday's MLS Cup championship game against the Kansas City Wizards.

Soccer fans who were at Blanchet Catholic School on Tuesday for the state Class 2A/1A game between the Cavaliers and De La Salle might be forgiven for thinking Adu had showed up on Market Street.

The Knights featured a cat-quick, diminutive waterbug of a forward named Luke Johnson, who was all over the field, making searing runs up both wings and uncorking shots from impossible angles.

Blanchet gamely attempted to stay with Johnson, often double-teaming him. In the end, though, a blistering 30-yard shot from an unreal angle by Johnson in the 66th minute proved to be the difference as De La Salle claimed a 2-1 victory.

The win put the Knights into the semifinals against Portland Christian.

On his decisive goal Johnson worked his way laterally across the field in the wake of a pair of Cavaliers defenders, then abruptly stopped and whistled a curving shot that ticked off the far post and into the net.

"We knew he was good," said Blanchet coach Dave Irby, whose team was making its first appearance in the state playoffs. "We scouted him and knew we had to mark him, but he's like greased lightning.

"His shot was a great shot, too. If it had been an inch the other way it would have kicked off the post. They say football's a game of inches, but soccer is, too."

Johnson's goal gave the Knights a 2-0 edge and forced the Cavaliers to play catchup. But the De La Salle defense, led by defenders Jeff Morgan and Joel Morgan, didn't crack until the 78th minute.

Blanchet's Greg Chandler passed the ball to Connor Flaherty, who made a great run up the left side, then crossed the ball to Michael Matt, who chipped it into the upper right corner of the net.

The Cavaliers had one last chance in the final minute when Nathan Irby flicked a header toward the surging Flaherty. But De La Salle goalkeeper Matthew Weekes alertly charged 15 yards out of the penalty area to clear the ball away.

De La Salle had taken a 1-0 lead in in the 20th minute. Jeff Morgan sent a 30-yard free kick into the penalty area, but it was cleared out on a header by Blanchet's Matt Kirk.

Corey Evans, however, was there to settle the ball and bang it in the net from 15 yards out.

Blanchet had an opportunity to tie it 11 minutes into the second half when freshman midfielder Terry Robinson was fouled in the penalty area. Flaherty's penalty kick, however, banged off the crossbar and the Knights were able to clear the ball away.

"They're a good team. They deserved it," said coach Irby. "It was tough to miss a penalty kick. We could have crumbled, but we kept working. That's a credit to our players.

"I was surprised how fast they (the Knights) were. They didn't look that fast when we scouted them."

De La Salle coach David Fisher, who has watched teams try to cope with Johnson's speed all season, recognizes the challenge other teams face.

"He's so quick it's hard to get a handle on him. You can man-mark Luke Johnson all you want, but you can't shut us down."

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