



Soccer: Mountie boys roll in state opener after disappointing county semifinal loss



MHS sophomore Evan O'Brien directs a header into the net for the first of five Mounties goals against Hackensack on Tuesday, Oct. 31, during the first round of the NJSIAA Tournament.

PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

by Andrew Garda

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Coming off a tough loss in the Essex County Tournament semifinals, the Montclair High School boys soccer team wanted to have a strong performance against the Hackensack Comets to reset their season.

The third-seeded Mounties (11-2-1) certainly got one, dismantling the No. 14 seed Comets 5-1 at Fortunato Field Tuesday afternoon. The Mounties now set their sights on a home quarterfinal game on Friday against No. 11 seed Union City and look to have their momentum carry them in the North 1, Group IV bracket.

For head coach Toure Weaver, the key to the victory over Hackensack was getting on the board quickly.

"I thought it was really good to get those early two goals," he said after the game. "That makes a huge difference."

Despite the rather vast difference in seeds, Weaver said he knew this would be a tough game.

“The way the seeding worked out, we’re No. 3 and they’re No. 14, but they were a better team than [their seed]. In the middle of the park, they were really dangerous. They had some technical players but once we got that score, I think we finally settled down.”

The Mounties opened up with a goal by Evan O’Brien less than three minutes into the half. Then Will Buttner and Jalen Anderson added to the total. Hackensack kept pressing, though, and was able to come up with a goal with 16 minutes left in the half. The Comets got more chances, though MHS remained in control, clogging passing lanes and keeping Hackensack offensive players from getting a clear look at goalkeeper Rowan O’Brien.

While MHS led 3-1 at the half, the Comets had spent a lot of time in the Mounties end of the field, so the lead didn’t quite feel safe.



Junior Salvador Pliego sends the ball downfield on a penalty kick late in the second half of Montclair's 5-1 NJSIAA win over Hackensack on Tuesday, Oct. 31.
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

“After we talked at halftime,” Weaver said, “I thought we really started to dominate the game,”

The Mounties came out of halftime and began to move the ball almost as at will against the Comets, nearly scoring several times before Declan O’Sullivan found the back of the net from outside the penalty box and then Marcos Ribeiro put in the finishing touch.

With five different Mounties scoring — and four Mounties getting assists — Weaver once again had occasion to laud the depth of his bench.

“Guys on this team can score, it’s really awesome. Every game, I have confidence we’re going to score goals. I just know we have the talent on the team to create opportunities, and we also have the talent on the team to finish them.”

That was true even in the 4-3 ECT loss to Millburn. That game was a back-and-forth affair, the outcome of which seemed to hinge on two officials disagreeing on where a throw-in should take place from.

It didn’t work out in Montclair’s favor, but Weaver said that’s no excuse for the loss.

“It was tough. We talk about owning the 18 and when it comes down to it, all the responsibility is on us. Doesn’t matter what the refs do, doesn’t matter what the other team does, at the end of the day we’ve got to handle our business and in the 18-yard box, it didn’t happen.”

Weaver was much more pleased with Tuesday’s effort.

“We were better today with guys taking responsibility, in both 18-yard boxes,” he said.

The Mounties were short a few players for the Millburn game as well, players they got back for Tuesday’s match. Again, Weaver said that’s not an excuse, especially for a deep team like MHS, but it had an impact.

“We got guys back [now] and I think we’re on the upswing again.”

Weaver now has a couple of days to prep his team for what he feels will be another tough matchup.

“Friday’s game will likely be a bit similar to [this] game. It’s a slightly better team but the same type of style of play.”