

Defenders Rally Past Midd-West

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By Barb Krohn, Staff Writer

HEPBURNVILLE—Warrior Run boys soccer coach Doug Bastian was not a happy camper. Not so much that his team was down 1-0 to Midd-West in the District 4 Class AA quarterfinals at Balls Mills Saturday afternoon. It was more about the Defenders lack of intensity.

"They weren't playing the game we play," said Bastian.

That all changed in the second half as Konner Sidler evened things up three and a half minutes after the intermission and Elias George scored with under 15 minutes left in regulation to lift the Defenders to a 2-1 win over the Mustangs.

Warrior Run, now 14-5, will face Central Columbia, the 2-0 winners over Athens, in bottom half of the bracket district semifinal at 5 p.m. Tuesday at Loyalsock High. Midd-West ends its season 13-6.

With three starters out with injuries it perhaps shouldn't have been a surprise that the already young team, "came out flat," according to George. "We weren't ready for the physicality of the play."

An exception being perhaps goalie Jason McWilliams who came out aggressively as the Mustangs took 11 first-half shots.

"(Midd-West) is known for being good in the air," said the senior keeper. "I just had to be aggressive."

And when Midd-West sophomore Sebastian Callender cashed in on a ball rolling around the box in the aftermath of a corner kick, McWilliams stepped up in another way.

"I took the blame for the first goal (at halftime)," said the senior.

It was one of the keys to Warrior Run's second-half success according to Bastian.

"It was good to accept responsibility so it wouldn't get into (the field players') heads that it was their fault. It made a huge difference. Especially since we were playing two freshman and two sophomores."

As for the seniors, "I asked them if they wanted this to be their last half of soccer."

The answer was a definitive no. And just as Midd-West dominated the first half, Warrior Run took over the second.

With the ball in the box, Sidler remembered something that Bastian had told the team when watching film—take the shot.

"It was just a very good play how the ball went into the box," said Sidler. "It rebounded and I took the shot."

George's goal came as the finale to a nice stretch of possession.

"We strung together a nice set of passes on the left side," said the senior co-captain. "I got a great through ball and happened to finish it."

Helped in part by switching Alex Wehr to midfield and Masen Wagner to defense the Defenders allowed just three Mustangs shots in the second half and cut Midd-West's six corner kicks in the first to just one in the second. There was just one dangerous shot from the Mustangs in the last two minutes of the game and McWilliams handled it easily.

Warrior Run faces a big challenge in its semifinal with Central. The Blue Jays have won both regular season games, 2-0 and 2-1.