

# Cardinals ready for second season; Forte's squad may be tourney's top seed

By Richard A. Kiley

Quite simply, the Cardinal Mooney varsity boys' soccer team is on a roll.

After last week's two shutouts of City-Catholic rivals East (4-0) and McQuaid (3-0), and a scoreless tie against Hilton, Head Coach Paul Forte's Cardinals are now unbeaten in their last 10 games.

With the sectional pairings due out early next week, Mooney, as of press time, could be seeded first in this year's tourney, having acquired the most number of points (45) for wins than any other Section 5 Class AAA squad.

Following last Saturday's 0-0 standoff against the Cadets, Mooney (12-2-1, 8-1 league) had not allowed a goal in three consecutive games, and had given up just a lone tally in its last four contests.

Against the host Knights last Thursday, in a game where both teams may have spent more time sliding in the mud than anything else, Mooney just overpowered its opponent for three unanswered goals, and now controls its own destiny heading into the final week of the season.

With its lone remaining league game against Edison, a team the Cardinals have had little trouble beating in the past, Forte's squad is in a position to clinch its sixth consecutive City-Catholic crown.

Not even the 40-degree temperature, which felt more like 20 degrees due to the windchill factor could cool down Mooney against McQuaid.

The game was scoreless for most of the first half, but that's not to say neither squad had its chances.

Mooney failed to click on several good opportunities, but it was the Knights who came the closest to scoring at the 15-minute mark, when a shot from about 20 yards out sailed over the outstretched arms of goalie Scott Cortese and hit the crossbar. The Cardinals' defense was then able to clear the ball out of danger. McQuaid, 8-6, 6-2 league, had its chances but couldn't capitalize.

Mooney's Rob Brunette, who has come forward in recent weeks as one of the leaders of this year's team, ended the scoring drought with 5:33 remaining in the first half. The senior's sliding shot after a perfect feed from Adam Schwartz gave Mooney the only goal it would need for the afternoon.

The game remained 1-0 until 9:32 into the second 40 minutes, when junior Peter Mojsej notched the first of his two goals. Mojsej, who has compiled 14 goals and six assists thus far this season, made no mistake on his breakaway goal, shooting the ball into the left side of the goal. The junior's tally was made possible on a perfect pass from Ray Alves, who continues to be a defensive stalwart for Forte this year. Both Alves and junior Todd Leary appear to have benefited from an early-season

position switch employed by Forte.

Mojsej, who has also profited from the defensive shift — he has seen more scoring opportunities of late — attributes his increased offensive production to another reason as well.

"Brunette and I have been switching (between center halfback and line)," Mojsej said. "Rob and I started that ourselves; it gives both us a little more room on the field . . . basically it just confuses the defense."

Mojsej, who saw much playing time as a sophomore on last year's Class AAA runnerup to Gates-Chili, said that this year's team finally seems at ease with itself.

"Last year's team had more seniors and we depended on (Tom) Sansone and (Tony) Ciccarelli a lot," Mojsej said. "This year is a more well balanced team. We work better together."

The junior attributed the Cardinals' rocky early start this season to the squad's having a lack of identity by trying to emulate the Mooney teams of the past.

"At the beginning of the season, we were always comparing ourselves to last year's team . . . Now we're comparing ourselves to our potential. That's made a big difference."

Mojsej iced the win against McQuaid with 8:42 remaining, when he found himself breaking toward the goal two on one with teammate Sackda Viravong, and tallied his 14th goal in 14 games.

Forte was pleased to see his team overcome the adverse playing conditions.

"I was probably the most surprised guy out there," said Forte, reflecting on his team's offensive production. "They (his players) played aggressively; we controlled the pace of the game."

Two days later against the Cadets, though, the Cardinal offense was shut down by a stingy Hilton defense. As if he needed any help, the game aided Forte in that it gave his squad a little taste of what is forthcoming.

"There were a little disappointed Saturday because they couldn't score, and I told them that this is the type of game you'll see in the sectionals," Forte said. "I said you have to be realistic, not every game is going to be easy. If you think that you'll be your own worst enemy?"



Michael N. Aydogan

Cardinal Mooney's Rob Brunette winds up to shoot during action against McQuaid. Brunette notched the first of three Cardinal goals for the afternoon.

The Cadets stand in third place in the sectional seedings race with 41 points, behind the Cardinals and Webster (43).

"The (Hilton) game showed them they'll really have to work hard from here on in," Forte said. "I told them you just played a sectional-quality team." Although he doesn't like to compare his team's to any other he has coached, Forte likened this year's squad to last "in its ability to come back and hang in their in tight games." That characteristic, according to the Mooney coach, "is the key to making it far in the sectionals."

All in all, things appear to be gelling at the right time for Forte. And barring any injuries, they should only get better. Looking ahead to next year, the Cardinals have a core of quality players returning for Forte — Mojsej, Schwartz, Viravong, Leary and Pat Corrigan and Chris Kehoe. The two juniors have attained game experience this season for Forte, who is confident future goaltending duties are already in good hands.

In addition to Mojsej, the Cardinals' scoring consists of Brunette (eight goals, three assists) Viravong (six goals, six assists) and Nick Bisciotti (four goals, two assists).

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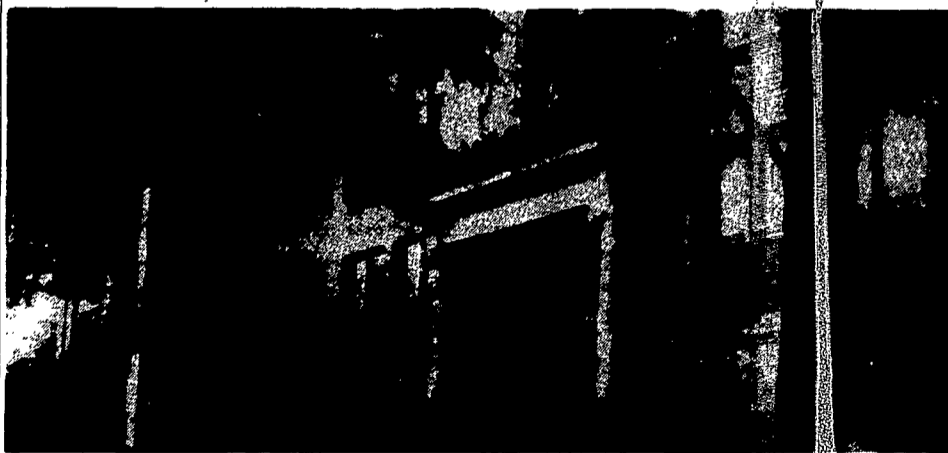
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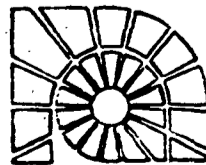
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