

Whitefield continues title defense, advances to semifinals with shutout

- Carlton White
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Whitefield Academy players celebrate after scoring on an own-goal by Savannah Country Day in the quarterfinals May 5, 2018. Staff - Carlton D. White

MABLETON – Whitefield Academy's boys soccer team continued its march towards its second straight championship after beating Savannah Country Day 2-0 in the Class A state quarterfinals Saturday.

The Area 5A champion WolfPack (16-5) advanced to the semifinals and will host Area 6A champion Paideia on Tuesday.

“So many things have to go your way to continue into the playoffs, no matter how quality of team you are,” Whitefield coach Steve Hellier said. “(Savannah Country Day) could have snuck a few in and we’d be in a completely different situation, but I’m very happy with the way our guys are playing right now, and we’ll take that into the semifinals.”

Led by defenders Simon Sengson, Jakob Burkett, Clayton MacLemore and Casey Torres, goalkeeper John Matherne and a consistent midfield pressure, Whitefield not only kept Savannah Country Day (16-4) off the scoreboard, but it prevented the Hornets from establishing any real presence on the WolfPack’s side of the field.

Savannah Country Day had one shot attempt in the final 10 seconds of the first half, and its only other attempt resulted in an own-goal in the fourth minute of the game, giving Whitefield a 1-0 lead.

The goal was set up on Sengson’s corner kick. He lobbed the ball into the box, and an errant header placed the ball in the net, putting the WolfPack on top.

Whitefield continued the pressure and outshot the Hornets 8-1 before the break. Goalkeeper Brett Goodman had five saves, and the WolfPack collected three corner kicks before the intermission.

Light rain started to fall at halftime, and a rainbow that appeared above the stadium went unnoticed by Hellier.

“We’re blessed in so many different ways,” he said. “I didn’t see the rainbow, but I wasn’t thinking very much about the rain. I was thinking about the game, but I am blessed to have such a quality team. These guys work so hard and do everything we ask them to do.”

The game play remained the same after the break, with Whitefield outshooting Savannah Country Day 11-0 in the second half and 6-0 in corner kicks. Goodman added four second-half saves.

It took a while for Whitefield to add an insurance goal, despite the constant pressure over the final 40 minutes. Another corner kick set up the final scoring opportunity as Matt Soud collected a rebounded ball inside the box and beat Goodman in the 78th minute.

“It can be frustrating when you see so many opportunities pass by and we can’t just put it in the net,” Hellier said. “Our guys played strong. (Savannah Country Day is) a really good team, but they didn’t threaten us very much. Our defense really held fast, but it would have been nice to sneak a couple more in that game, for sure.”

Hellier liked what he saw from his team as it heads into the Tuesday’s semifinal, and hopes that the extra practice will help the team moving forward.

“I’m really happy with the way we’re playing right now, except on the finishing end,” Hellier said. “That ebbs and flows and comes and goes, and all we can do is continue to go out on the field and continue to practice what we want to work on in games.

“We just pray that it will come to fruition when the time comes, and we got enough in the goal to win this game. We’re very happy with that and blessed by it, and we’ll continue to move on.”