

Falcons Edge Bobcats In Tournament Opener

Written by Whitney Noble

Wednesday, 06 November 2013 08:28

The fifth-seeded Pfeiffer University men's soccer team staged a pair of rallies, and scored late in the 82nd minute to edge fourth-seeded Lees-McRae College 3-2 in the quarterfinal round of the Conference Carolinas Tournament after Jacob Copeland (Raleigh, N.C.) opened his collegiate account with a second-half strike on Tuesday evening on Tate Field.

The match proved to be a tightly contested battle fought almost entirely in the center of the park, with Lees-McRae (9-7-1) holding a 19-15 advantage in shots, including an 11-9 margin in the first half. The Bobcats attempted five corners in the match to three for Pfeiffer (10-8-1).

Matthew Cureton (Waxhaw, N.C.) and Copeland each found the back of the net for the Bobcats, as Copeland netted his first collegiate goal to knot the score in the second half. Freshman Jordan Wright (West Lothian, Scotland) added a pair of assists, while Thomas Rusling (Sheffield, England) made five saves to pass Bobcat great Sean Paradise for fourth on the program's all-time list with 265 career stops.

Rusling caps one of the best individual careers in program history, finishing his four-year tenure with the Bobcats ranked third in shutouts (21), goals against average (1.09), and save percentage (0.764), and fourth in wins (36).

The senior goalkeeper kept at least five clean sheets in each of his four seasons, including a

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career-high seven shutouts this fall to lead the Bobcats to the fourth seed in the conference tournament. Rusling has named to two all-region teams in his career, while also earning all-Conference Carolinas Third team honors in 2011 and conference tournament MVP recognition in 2010.

Ryan Gillespie (Holly Springs, N.C.) put together an outstanding three-year career with the Bobcats, totaling five goals and two match-winners while playing in the midfield and along the backline. The senior defender has been a tremendous part of the Bobcats' success this season, wearing the captain's armband for the majority of the campaign while playing a leadership role in the defensive third.

Chris DeSanto (Greensboro, N.C.) closes out a four-year career in the Green and Gold characterized by tremendous work ethic and team spirit, appearing in 26 matches over the last three seasons while working his way into ever-increasing playing time. The Greensboro, N.C. native recorded his first collegiate point earlier this season, making a brilliant run down the flank before sending a cross to the back post to set up Isauro Estrada's (Newland, N.C.) first career goal.

Nathan Regis, Seth Dey, and Paco Cortez Vazquez each tallied a goal in the contest for Pfeiffer, with Vazquez providing the winning strike late in the second half. Dey also added an assist in the contest, as Aldo Ramirez chipped in a helper of his own. Nicolas Dulac made six saves to earn the victory for the Falcons.

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The Bobcats got off to a flying start in the third minute, taking an early 1-0 lead when Cureton buried a blocked shot by Wright into the bottom corner for his fourth of the season. Pfeiffer leveled proceedings midway through the ninth minute, knotting the score at 1-1 when Regis converted from the spot after the Falcons were awarded a penalty kick.

Alford nearly reclaimed the advantage for the Bobcats in the 24th, forcing a skillful stop by Dulac before the Falcon keeper turned away a pair of successive attempts from Cureton, including a brilliant strike in the 35th after a run inside that the netminder just touched over the bar.

Pfeiffer received a turn of fortune in the 43rd minute, taking a 2-1 lead when a headed clearance fell to Dey 35 yards out. Dey then unleashed a driven strike off a quick settle, tucking the finish into the far top corner for his third goal of the season.

The Bobcats answered in the 67th minute, evening the tally at 2-2 when Copeland netted his first career goal just two minutes after coming on. Wright once again started the play with a neat flick on, putting Copeland in behind for the open-net finish following a deflection off the keeper.

Pfeiffer would respond with a concerted push forward, outshooting the Bobcats by a 3-1 margin over the next few minutes while spending much of that stretch in the attacking third. The Falcons' work rate and determination were rewarded late in the 82nd minute, when Ramirez flicked a long throw from Dey to Vazquez on the back post for the cross goal finish and a 3-2

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lead.

The Bobcats nearly sent the match to extra time with a late push, coming within inches of the equalizer moments before the final whistle when Wright sent a close-range effort just wide of the woodwork.

Lees-McRae is expected to return 21 letter-winners from this season's squad which posted a 5-3 record in conference play, while limiting opponents to just six goals in league action. The Bobcats will bring a talented and seasoned corps into the 2014 campaign, led by rising seniors James Smith (Eastbourne, England), James Galvani (High Wycombe, England), Brandon Meade (Mocksville, N.C.), Andrew Shoemaker (Raleigh, N.C.), and Alford.

Photo Courtesy: Thomas Rusling, LMC Athletics