

COMEBACK KINGS

Boys soccer makes CCS for the first time since 1998

BY NATHAN DESAI

THIS IS HOW THEY STARTED.

The last time boys soccer made CCS over half the current roster hadn't been born yet. Last season MVHS came closer than they had in the 15 seasons before, suffering a heartbreaking loss to Homestead High School in the final game of the season, with the Matadors needing only a draw against their crosstown rivals to qualify.

So it was only fitting that MVHS would square off against the Mustangs in the opening game of this season, seeking vengeance for the devastating defeat from the prior year.

Despite losing five players to graduation, MVHS recruited six-time CCS champion Patrick Lowney to serve as the team's head coach and with his black glasses, black rain jacket and tan baseball cap, he makes his presence known at every match. As he yelled instructions at his players in their opening match against the Mustangs, his booming voice could be heard all the way from the rally court.

But Lowney found himself at a disadvantage in his opening match, with seniors Dima Gutnik, Anurag Kelkar and Brad Ohadi out with injuries. Without them, MVHS

suffered a 2-0 loss in Lowney's first league game for MVHS and although the returning players were upset that they couldn't exact revenge against HHS, the experienced coach urged them to keep their cool as they had plenty of time left to earn the seven points needed to qualify for CCS.

"We can't worry too much about this game," Lowney said. "We got 11 games left."

THIS IS HOW THEY FELL APART.

Sure, a loss to the eventual league champions is understandable for any team. But on Jan. 27, MVHS found themselves in the same position they were before that opening match: preparing to play HHS in hopes of winning their first league game.

The only difference was that this time the season was halfway over.

But a scoreless draw on Los Gatos High School's wasteland of a field and senior Varun Kalandoor' stoppage time equalizer against Santa Clara High School were all that kept the Matadors from

starting the season on a six-game losing streak. The odds weren't against MVHS but the momentum certainly was.

It took MVHS almost five hours of play to score a goal and the team continued to struggle with injuries with Ohadi nursing a nagging leg problem and senior Greg Moe injuring his neck in a loss to Palo Alto High School.

So it took the team by surprise when they scored six minutes into the reverse fixture against HHS with junior Radwan Hamwi tapping in a cross from Ohadi.

"This is the first time we've had a lead all season," junior Hari Kaushik said.

The lead only lasted for three minutes with the Mustangs scoring three goals within seven minutes to bury the Matadors. They tacked on another later for good

measure, handing MVHS a 4-1 loss, their worst defeat of the season.

In theory, the Matadors could draw all their remaining games and still qualify for

ENJOY THIS. BUT ENJOY IT SO MUCH THAT WE WANT MORE.

head coach Patrick Lowney



JAN. 8

Head coach Patrick Lowney leads senior Brad Ohadi in MVHS' senior night game against Los Gatos High School. The Matadors escaped LGHS with a 0-0 draw.



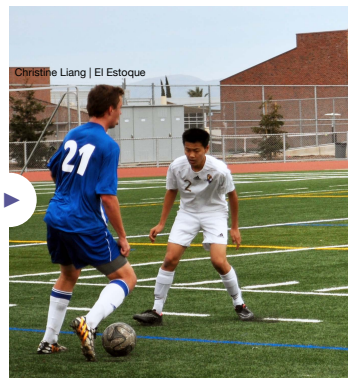
JAN. 27

Senior Brad Ohadi tries to weave through the Homestead High School defense. Despite scoring the opening goal in this fixture, MVHS lost 4-1.



FEB. 3

Senior Michael Ligier fights for possession against Palo Alto High School. MVHS upset the league leaders at PAHS with a 1-0 victory.



FEB. 5

Sophomore Alex Dunn defends against Los Altos High School. Despite losing 3-2 to the Eagles in their first matchup, MVHS drew 1-1 this time.



Check elestoque.org/soccer15 for an in-depth season review.

CCS but the embarrassing loss against HHS clearly had a huge impact on team morale with the players sitting in silence following the loss.

To them, the pain seemed eternal. They needed a miracle to save them from their misery.

And they got it.

THIS IS HOW THEY TURNED IT AROUND.

Heading into their Feb. 3 matchup at Palo Alto High School, the Matadors were still without a win and sat at the bottom of the table. On the other hand, all PAHS had done all season is win and found themselves in first place in league. The visitors had payback on their minds having lost to the Vikings 1-0 earlier in the season but MVHS would have to shut down the unbeatable and impenetrable PAHS. Heading into the fixture, the Vikings were a perfect 7-0-0 in league, and hadn't conceded a goal in over ten hours of play.

It took Ohadi just 35 seconds to put an end to that streak.

And from there, all MVHS had to do was hold on for dear life. As the referee blew the final whistle, the Matador bench stormed the field to celebrate their season-swinging upset. Ohadi even unleashed his best Matthew McConaughey impression, getting his teammates to pound on their chests like the actor did in "The Wolf of Wall Street."

And amidst the celebration, Lowney had

to ensure that his players' excitement didn't hinder their focus for the three games that lied ahead.

"If we win another game, we're gonna be in CCS," he said to his team. "Enjoy this. But enjoy it so much that we want more."

THIS IS HOW THEY LET IT SLIP.

With the form the Matadors were in during the first half of the season, two points from three games would've seemed impossible. But a win against the league leaders boosted the team's confidence and proved that MVHS had the capability to beat any team in the league.

"Remember when Brad said we'd win the next four and everyone laughed?" Moe said following the victory at PAHS. "We're gonna [do it.]"

With SCHS and Mountain View High School standing in the Matadors' way, all they needed was a single draw to put an end to 17 years of misfortune.

But they lost their momentum, losing 1-0 to SCHS and the silence that plagued the team after games early in the season was back. But Lowney — the team's constant beacon of inspiration — was there for guidance as always.

"I'm going to CCS," he said to his players. "I'm either going to buy a ticket to get into the stadium because I love soccer or I am going to have the privilege to be there with you."

And with three minutes left in MVHS'

final league game, it looked like Lowney would have to watch this postseason from the stands.

THIS IS HOW THEY SAVED THEIR SEASON.

Last year, the Matadors' CCS chances came down to the final game of the season. All they needed to make the postseason was a tie. Instead, the Matadors were a mess in defense, conceding three goals and blowing their chances of making the playoffs.

And the exact same thing happened this year too.

Mountain View High School — who had beaten the Matadors 3-2 in the first meeting between these two sides — had a 3-0 lead with just three minutes remaining. All the Matadors wanted to do at this point was give the fans something to cheer about, call it a season and hope that 2016 would be the year the streak finally ends.

All they were looking for was a consolation goal.

So Hamwi gave them a three-minute hat-trick instead.

"That was straight out of the Bible," Adiga said.

Sure, it was a scrappy hat-trick with two goals coming from penalties and the other due to careless defending but no Matador was complaining.

Ohadi's McConaughey impression was back, the supporters stormed the field and Lowney walked off into the chilly night just as mysteriously as he had arrived.

The decorated coach had worked his magic. And no one knew just how many more tricks he had up his sleeve.



Justin Kim | El Estoque

FEB. 17 Junior Radwan Hamwi scores his first goal in the senior game against Mountain View High School. Hamwi scored five goals in two games against the Spartans this year.

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.

“I still have no idea how we ended up with a seventh seed,” Ohadi said before their first round CCS matchup.

Despite their sole regular season win, the Matadors nabbed a high seed due to their stellar preseason. Although the seniors thought they had already played their final home game, they’d play at MVHS one last time against Evergreen Valley High School.

If the drama of MVHS’ first CCS game since 1998 wasn’t enough, a victory would also be the 250th of Lowney’s career.

The Cougars came out hacking though with Adiga getting kicked in the stomach and Ligier getting elbowed in the back within the first 15 minutes of the game.

“They’re not just going in hard,” junior Peter Enescu said. “They’re going in with their cleats up.”

Hamwi scored a penalty after 30 minutes and EVHS replied with a second half equalizer. The 1-1 scoreline would hold for the rest of the match. MVHS’ first CCS game in 17 years would be settled in a penalty shootout.

Every kick carried the weight of the entire season with it. Some players could barely look. The fans started trickling on to the track. Lowney stared on calm as always.

Srinivas made three saves in the shootout to seal a Matador victory. His teammates rushed in from midfield to dogpile their hero. Even the fans started running on the field, including assistant coach Pooya Hajjarian embraced Srinivas after the tense shootout.

“I’m so proud of you,” he said. “You just made my day.”

The thrilling victory was not only a monumental win for MVHS, but a huge one for Lowney too. Although someone had knocked over the cooler, Ohadi and Kompella scooped up some ice with their hands and poured them on their coach just like they said they would at the beginning of the season.

“It was a tie,” Lowney said about the full-time score as he wiped ice off his shoulders.

“But we’re going through, Coach!” Kompella said.

“We’ll count it as a win,” Lowney said with a grin on his face.

So with Lowney’s 250th win out of the way, the Matadors crossed their fingers that they could lift the CCS trophy with his 253rd. They’d need a miracle to get his 251st.

In the pouring rain, the Matadors had 80 minutes to tame the WHS and advance to the next round. Heading into the game, WHS was 17-0-3 and the sixth best team in the nation.

It was destined to be an uphill battle for MVHS though, as they’d have to take down the reigning CCS co-champions to make it to the semifinals. Not only that, but they were also at a disadvantage due to the referees’ familiarity with their opponents.

“They referee a lot of games in this area,” Hajjarian said. “They know which players are

good and which ones draw a lot of fouls.”

MVHS’ conservative defense led to WHS’ first goal following a blocked shot. But the Matadors persisted and despite being the inferior team on paper, they needed just three minutes to level the score. Senior Dima Gutnik — MVHS’ long throw specialist — launched a ball all the way into the six yard box. The booming throw took a deflection off a WHS defender, making the score 1-1 at the half.

With his players now drenched in sweat instead of rain, Lowney urged MVHS to push on and they appeared to have their reward 15 minutes into the second half.

Adiga slid the ball to Hamwi who calmly passed it into the back of the net. The bench erupted, Lowney celebrated and the fans cheered. Offside.

A minute later WHS fired a ball from 30 yards out which found its way past Srinivas and the game was back under Wildcat control. An additional goal in stoppage time sealed the game and the Matadors on the field fell to their knees in devastation.

“I know it doesn’t feel good to lose,” Lowney said. “But you guys did it the right way and I’m proud of you.”

Though their wild and improbable run was over, so were almost two decades of pain. And if Lowney remains at the helm, it probably won’t take the Matadors 17 years to make MVHS proud again.

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I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU JUST MADE MY DAY.

assistant coach Pooya Hajjarian



Christine Liang | El Estoque



Christine Liang | El Estoque

FEB. 28

Sophomore Nikash Narula passes the ball upfield in a CCS quarterfinal match against Watsonville High School. MVHS saw their season come to a close in the 3-1 loss to WHS.

FEB. 25

The Matadors tackle senior Anirudh Srinivas in celebration following their penalty shootout victory against Evergreen Valley High School. Srinivas’ three shootout saves led MVHS to victory.