

## H.S. Soccer: Newton boys stopped in HWS title game

By PETER STEIN

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HACKETTSTOWN — Even in Saturday's dismal weather, winning the Hunterdon Warren Sussex Tournament would have made it a great day for the Newton boys soccer team.

That was the Braves' objective when battling Delaware Valley in the HWS title game at Hackettstown High School. But Newton just couldn't get its offense untracked, despite repeated attempts to set up Steve Churchill and others throughout the game.

Delaware Valley did manage a few finishes and posted a 3-0 victory to capture the crown, leaving the Braves feeling as gloomy as the weather.

"We really wanted to win this," Newton coach Pat Brennan said. "We're pretty disappointed."

"They (Delaware Valley) put the ball in the back of the net," Newton midfielder Andy Weber said, "and that's why they're the winners and we're going home in second place."

Neither team had tasted defeat in quite awhile. DV hadn't lost since Sept. 15; Newton was last toppled on Oct. 7. And the Braves had reason to think their unbeaten streak would continue beyond Saturday. After all, Churchill came in with a team-best 11 goals. Leo Recalde had nine goals, and Brett Conrads had six.

But it was a Delaware Valley player with no goals before Saturday's game — Chris Morgan — who scored the only goal his team would need, firing a rebound shot past a diving Kyle Morel with 23:54 left in the first half.

Newton searched and searched for the equalizer, trying to maneuver on the frozen slush that began to accumulate on Hackettstown's turf field.

"The ball was slipping a lot," Weber said. "(The field) has got a thin layer of ice on it that kind of threw us off our game a little bit. You can't blame the conditions, though."

Especially since Delaware Valley had to operate on the same field. And even in ideal conditions, a defensive game wouldn't have been surprising because both goalies — Morel and DV's Matt Blanke — came in with 60-plus saves this season.

Late in the first half, Newton still needed just one to tie and had some decent chances. With roughly 31/2 minutes to go, Churchill raced with the ball toward DV's goal, but three Terriers quickly surrounded him and his shot was blocked. Seconds later, tough DV defense kept Ryan Cronin from firing off a good shot.

Then with 45 seconds left before halftime, a Churchill attempt from 15 yards was wide left.

For most of the second half, Newton was still just a tally away from a 1-all tie, but couldn't sneak one past Blanke.

The clock had slipped under the 15-minute mark when trouble started brewing near the Braves' goal. Conrads tried to clear out a dangerous crossing pass, but his kick was blocked. Conrads did finally get the ball away, but it soon came to the Terriers' Alex Carlson, who sent a perfect pass to DV scoring leader Dan Weldon, and Weldon punched home his 14th goal of the season with 14:28 remaining.

Now owning a two-goal cushion, Delaware Valley played with five men back, making Newton's task of breaking through even more challenging.

Near the five-minute mark, DV's Jordan Fowlin sent a seemingly innocuous cross pass from the right corner, and Weldon headed it in from the left side for the Terriers' third goal.

Both teams now forge ahead into the state tournament. Newton holds the fourth seed in North 1, Group 2 and will host 13th-seeded Hasbrouck Heights on Tuesday at 4 p.m.

"We've got to put this game in the past," Weber said, "but at the same time, we have to learn from it."

Delaware Valley 3, Newton 0

DV 1 2 — 3

N 0 0 — 0

Goals: DV — Dan Weldon 2, Chris Morgan

Assists: DV — Alex Carlson, Jordan Fowlin

Saves: DV — Matt Blanke 9, Kyle Morel 8

Team records: Delaware Valley 15-1-1, Newton 14-3-1