

Sep. 22 Boys Soccer



Nottingham's Aaron Stovall goes up for a header during today's 1-0 win over Hopewell. Stovall was robbed of two goals by HoVal goalie Mike Barr (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Iloka's goal, Guest's save paces 5-0 Nottingham past Hopewell Valley

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Sep. 22: It's starting to get serious for the Nottingham High boys soccer team.

As in, the Northstars are a serious Colonial Valley Conference contender by virtue of their 1-0 win over Hopewell Valley today, which raised their record to 5-0.

"It's unbelievable," coach Mike Braender said. "This is new territory for everybody. I told them the other day we need to really take every game as we're 0 and 0. We break the season down in different sections and every game is the first game.

"Five and 0 is great but five and nine could be right down the corner. This is a tough conference, we still have big games to go."

Nottingham handled two pretty big ones this week, beating Notre Dame Tuesday and topping Hopewell today. The Bulldogs lost 16 players from last year's Central Jersey Group III finalist but still possess tons of talent and will be heard from before it's over.

HoVal (3-2-1) carried a three-game winning streak in to the game. And while he was unhappy with his own team's play, Hopewell coach Ed Gola was impressed with the Northstars.

“They definitely had some dynamic guys up top last year and I think those guys are still there,” Gola said. “They have a year of experience under their belt and they have some complementary players that make them more dangerous than last year

“(Luca) deStasio’s tough in the middle. They deserved to win today and hopefully we’ll learn from it.”

Nottingham held a 14-7 advantage in shots and could have had a few more goals were it not for the outstanding play of Bulldog ‘keeper Mike Barr. The junior made several outstanding saves, and robbed Aaron Stovall twice.

But even Barr had no chance on the day’s lone goal, when deStasio got around the defender on the right side and launched a shot that the goalie saved initially. But the rebound went to Uzo Iloka, who banged it home in the game’s 33rd minute.

“We just try to control the ball,” Iloka said. “I was in the right place there.”

The game’s other goalie made sure that would be the winning score, as Taylor Guest came up big in the second half.

With just over 30 minutes left, Hopewell’s Dylan Kalwa had a penalty kick. He sent it to the lower right and Guest, in just his second year playing ‘keeper, dove and made the save.

“That was huge,” Braender said. “We actually did penalty kicks the other day at practice and it was a little different than that. He didn’t stop too many in practice. But he came through big right there. He keeps himself with another shutout, that’s real big.”

Helping maintain the ‘Stars second shutout was towering sweeper Obinna Iloka, (Uzo’s brother), who gets his head on every threatening ball.

“I just feel like every ball in the air is my ball,” Obinna said. “This is just my first year (at sweeper), I used to play outside midfield. It’s all good.”

The switch has worked wonders for Nottingham, which has not allowed more than one goal in a game this year.

“For him to give up his scoring ability (five goals last year as a sub) and to step up and come back as a senior and play defense is huge. We’re trying to stress to them defense is just as important as the offensive side of the game and our statistics are a testament to what he’s done back there.

“He really does run the show. He’s been talking to everybody.”

Nottingham also got help from sophomore Sheik Bangora, who got called up from JV when stopper Bensley Blain injured his knee several games ago.

“He was an 80-minute player today and he did a great job,” Braender said. “Blain is supposed to be out a week or two, but it’s nice seeing what Sheik can do because it gives us another defender back there.”

Add it all up, and it comes out to 5-0.

It’s not a surprise to at least one player.

“I thought we could do this,” Obinna Iloka said. “We’re good. We just have to keep going.”

Spartan scoring woes continue in tie with WWPS

Steinert continues to wallow in the offensive third, playing a struggling West Windsor-Plainsboro South team to a scoreless tie.

The Spartans had eight shots on goal in 100 minutes, while ‘keeper Devin Downs made nine saves to preserve the tie. Steinert has just one goal in over its last 340 minutes.

Hamilton falls to Robbinsville by familiar score

For the second straight game, Hamilton was on the short end of a 1-0 score as Robbinsville's Brenden Barca scored the game's lone goal in the first half. The Hornets also fell to Steinert 1-0 on Tuesday.

Kyle Rogers made 11 saves in goal.