Bucks play Gem of a game vs. Dayton but miss Cup spot

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The breakout came, but it came too late.

The Mid-Michigan Bucks were expected to be a potent offensive force in their run for a fourth-straight berth in the U.S. Open Cup. But only once did the Bucks manage to score more than two goals in their four qualifiers, and that proved a decisive factor.

That one time came Saturday when the Bucks dismantled the Dayton (Ohio) Gems, 4-1 in a Premier Development League soccer match Saturday at Plymouth Canton High School.

The win gave the Bucks a 3-0-1 record in their qualifiers — good, but not quite good enough. The Des Moines Menace were also 3-0-1, but edged the Bucks on goal differential (plus-10 to plus-five) to gain the Open berth.

The Bucks are currently 3-1-1 in the United Soccer League's Great Lakes Division.

The disappointment of not qualifying for the U.S. Open, which could have given the Bucks a shot at playing an MLS team (they defeated New England in a Cup match in 2000), was apparent but hardly overwhelming.

According to general manager Jim Duggan, the Bucks — under first-year head coach Dario Brose — are just beginning to congeal.

"The last two games have been a significant improvement in our team playing as a team," said Duggan. "The organization through the central midfield has been much better. They mark up quickly and there's great improvement in not giving the ball away."

That wasn't the case in a 2-1 overtime loss to the Chicago Fire Reserves in a match played 12 days ago. "Horrendous," was Duggan's description of his team's play in the midfield against the Fire. "And on both of their goals, our defenders left their marks."

Both the players and the coach — who, due in great part to NCAA regulations that forbid college players (who make up most of the Bucks' roster) from joining PDL teams before May 1, had just one week of practice together before the season-opener — are now becoming familiar with each other.

"The guys are getting to know each other," said Duggan. "Dario is getting to know them, what they can do, and they're finding out what's expected of them. We've got a lot of depth."

Saturday's game did have some similarities with previous matches. For starters, poor weather delayed the start of the game by 45 minutes.

Then the Bucks started slowly, allowing the winless Gems (0-4) to take the early lead on a goal scored in the 12th minute. They tied it a minute before halftime, Pat Noonan getting the first of his two goals in the game. Boyzzz Khumalo assisted.

The Bucks took the lead for good five minutes into the second half when Shawn Lee, a defender from Trinidad and Tobago making his debut with the Bucks, pushed forward and scored unassisted. Nine minutes later Noonan scored again, this time with an assist from Justin Detter.

The Bucks' final goal came from John Swann, 17 minutes into the second half; Ryan Mack (from Birmingham Seaholm) assisted.

Eric Pogue (Troy Athens) was in goal for the Bucks; he had five saves. The Bucks play their second, and last, match of the season at Birmingham Seaholm at 7 p.m. Sunday, this one against the Indiana Invaders.

The two teams met in the season-opener in Indiana, a match that ended in a 1-1 draw, called 20 minutes early due to inclement weather.

Discounted tickets for the match may be purchased from the Bloomfield Force/Flames and the Michigan Hawks/Wolves soccer clubs; at George's Soccer Stores in Lathrup Village and Troy; or at Global Soccer in Lake Orion. Tickets at the gate are $9 for adults and $6 for students.

For more information on tickets or the Bucks, call (734) 483-GOAL or e-mail the Bucks at info@mmbucks.com.

THE WEEK AHEAD

PREP BASEBALL
Thursday, May 30
Redford CC at A.A. Pioneer (2), 4 p.m.
BOYS & GIRLS TRACK
Friday-Saturday, May 31-June 1
Division I state meet at Rockford.
Division II state meet at Grand Rapids.
BOYS TENNIS
Friday-Saturday, May 31-June 1
Division II state meet at Holland.
GIRLS GOLF
Friday-Saturday, May 31-June 1
Division I state meet at East Lansing.
GIRLS LACROSSE
Thursday, May 30
Division C quarterfinal
Farmington vs. Flint Powers, 4:30 p.m. at Lansing Waverly.
Friday, May 31
Division C championship
TBA at Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook.
DISTRICT BASEBALL PAIRINGS
DIVISION I
REDFORD CATHOLIC CENTRAL (host)
Saturday, June 1: Redford Catholic Central vs. Farmington, 10 a.m.; Livonia Stevenson vs. Redford Union, noon.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
WALLED LAKE CENTRAL (host)
Saturday, June 1: Walled Lake Western vs. White Lake Lakeland; Milford vs. Walled Lake Central.
Championship final: Approximately 3 p.m.
BIRMINGHAM GROVES (host)
Saturday, June 1: Birmingham Groves vs. Birmingham Brother Rice, 10 a.m.; Berkley vs. Southfield-Lathrup, 1 p.m.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
DIVISION II
DETROIT COUNTRY DAY (host)
Saturday, June 1: Farmington Harrison vs. Bloomfield Hills Andover, 10 a.m.; Birmingham Seaholm vs. Detroit Country Day, noon.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
GIRLS SOFTBALL
DISTRICT PAIRINGS
DIVISION I
FARMINGTON HILLS MERCY (host)
Saturday, June 1: Redford Union vs. Livonia Stevenson, 10 a.m.; Farmington Hills Mercy vs. Farmington, noon.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
WALLED LAKE CENTRAL (host)
Saturday, June 1: Walled Lake Western vs. North Farmington, 10 a.m.; Milford vs. Walled Lake Central, noon.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
BIRMINGHAM GROVES (host)
Saturday, June 1: Birmingham Groves vs. West Bloomfield, 10 a.m.; Berkley vs. Southfield-Lathrup, noon.
Championship final: 2 p.m.
DIVISION II
DETROIT COUNTRY DAY (host)
Saturday, June 1: Farmington Harrison vs. Bloomfield Hills Kingswood, 11 a.m.; Birmingham Seaholm vs. Detroit Country Day, 1 p.m.
Championship final: 3 p.m.
GIRLS SOCCER
DISTRICT PAIRINGS
DIVISION I
LIVONIA STEVENSON (host)
Thursday, May 30: Livonia Churchill at Farmington Hills Mercy, 3:30 p.m.; Livonia Stevenson at Livonia Franklin, 7 p.m.
Saturday, June 1: Championship final, 1 p.m. at Livonia Stevenson.
DIVISION II
LIVONIA LADYWOOD (host)
Thursday, May 30: North Farmington at Farmington Harrison, 7 p.m.; Redford Union at Livonia Ladywood, 6:30 or 7 p.m.
Saturday, June 1: Championship final, 1 p.m.

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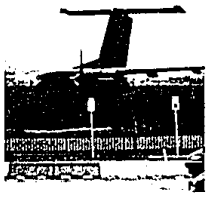

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