

Wipe the Slate Clean
By Tom Liguori

It seems like just a few weeks ago players were lacing up their cleats in preparation for their first day of preseason. The regular season always seems to fly by, but the soccer season is not over yet.

The end of the regular season in Conference ABC marks a new beginning for 16 Class A teams as they begin their quest for a chance to raise the 2009 Nassau County Class A Championship on November 11th. The winner will represent all 29 Nassau County Class A teams for a chance to play the Suffolk champion in the Long Island Championship. But teams will have to take it one game at a time as there are many teams capable of making a run and a number of intriguing first round match-ups. First round games are scheduled to kick off Sunday, November 1st at the higher seed (some games will be played Friday and Saturday). Here's a preview of the opening acts:

Conference I Champion Garden City (9-0-3) easily earns the #1 seed and will host #16 Levittown-Division (10-2-0 Conference V) on Saturday, October 31st at 2:00pm. Garden City is the only unbeaten team in the Tournament and is currently ranked #2 in New York State. It's hard to argue they are not the team to beat. Known for their lockdown defense, senior goalkeeper George Spanos (9 shutouts) leads a stingy Trojans side that has allowed a mere seven goals all season. The Trojans will need to continue their stellar team defending as Levittown-Division boasts five players with five or more goals. Junior Johnny Pelligrino (11 goals) leads the Blue Dragons offense as they will be fired up and looking for the big upset.

#2 Southside (5-2-5 Conference I) will host #15 Manhasset (5-2-5 Conference IV) on Friday, October 30th at 7:00pm. Southside is also a team that is built on defense, allowing only nine goals in the regular season. Senior goalkeeper Paul Casazza (6 shutouts) leads a relatively young but battle-tested Cyclones squad. Southside will need to keep the defense tight as Manhasset had 10 different players find the back of the net. Manhasset is led by senior Nico Capetola whose 14 goals are best in Class A. The Indians just recently beat the Cyclones 1-0 in a non-league game but it's safe to say neither team showed too much to the other.

3 Roslyn (5-5-2 Conference I) will host Conference IV Champion #14 Plainedge (9-3-0) on Friday, October 30th at 2:30pm. Senior goalkeeper Adam Hoffman has recorded 5 shutouts for Roslyn in a competitive Conference I where all but one of the Bull Dogs losses has been decided by a single goal. Plainedge has 10 players who have scored at least one goal this season, led by senior Michael Guzzardi (9 goals). The Red Devils have to feel good about hoisting the Conference Championship trophy but will need their best effort to beat a Roslyn side that traditionally fires on all cylinders in the postseason.

#4 Jericho (4-4-4 Conference I) will host #13 Bethpage (6-1-5 Conference III) on Friday, October 30th at 2:45pm. It seems most Conference I teams are built on good team defense, and Jericho is no exception. The defending County Champion Jayhawks will look to defend their crown with help from Ben Rechler (5 shutouts) and good team defense. Jericho will look to senior Onur Ilingi to start the Jayhawks offense. Bethpage has also shown they can defend well, as junior goalkeeper Bryan Gottlieb (7 shutouts) and the Bethpage defense has been solid. The Golden Eagles have five seniors with at least two or more goals, led by Bryan Schmier (6 goals, 5 assists).

#5 Mineola (2-5-5-Conference I) will host #12 Valley Stream North (8-2-2 Conference III) on Sunday, November 1st at 1:00pm. Mineola received goals from nine different players this season, led by junior Marco Oliveira (5 goals). The Mustangs are experienced, with 13 seniors on their roster. Valley Stream North had 10 players find the back of the net this season, led by senior Xavier O'Connor (7 goals, 5 assists). The Spartans were in the mix for the Conference title all season and posted nice results in their non-league contests.

6 Valley Stream South (2-9-1 Conference I) will host Conference III Champion #11 Hewlett (9-2-1) on Saturday, October 31st at 10:00am. VSS returned only 3 seniors from last year's squad but hope their experience in Conference I will help them make a run. Junior Ryan Flynn leads the Falcons in scoring with 4 goals and 3 assists and seniors Angel Aguirre and Anthony Carreras each have netted a pair. Hewlett has played good team defense and senior Zachary Feuer has 8 shutouts. 11 different players have scored 25 goals for the Bulldogs, led by junior Max Mena (5 goals).

In one of the two first round games where teams will unfortunately have to play each other a third time, Conference II Champion #7 New Hyde Park (8-2-2) will host #10 Island Trees (3-6-3 Conference II) on Sunday, November 1st at 1:00pm. New Hyde Park is led by senior goalkeeper Mario Lisena who has notched 7 shutouts this season. The Gladiators led Conference II in goals against allowing only 11 goals. The Island Trees offense is led by juniors Andrew Willoughby (8 assists) and Nick Jorge (8 goals). The Bulldogs are a team that can get hot at any time. The two teams drew 2-2 in their first meeting and NHP won in the second meeting 4-1.

In the other rematches of rematches, # 8 Lynbrook (6-2-4 Conference II) will host #9 Wantagh (5-4-3 Conference II) at North Middle School on Sunday, November 1st at 1:00pm. Lynbrook is led by senior Andrew Malordy (10 goals) and the defense is anchored by senior Jordan Zides. Nine different players have scored goals for the Owls. Wantagh's Sean DeVito (5 goals) starts the attack for Wantagh. The Warriors defense is anchored by senior Ian Daly and senior goalkeeper Derek Novotny who lead a defense that has allowed just 12 Conference goals. Lynbrook won the first meeting 3-0 and the teams drew 1-1 in their last meeting.

The 2009 Class A Tournament always provides some drama. In a tournament like this one, where it's "win you move on, lose you're gone" the slate is wiped clean and everyone is undefeated again. Bet of luck to all 16 teams!