

Spring-Ford's historic postseason run ends against Freedom

ALLENTOWN >> Freedom head coach Matthew Reightler was completely certain.

"That was the best team we faced all year. I'll say that without a doubt," the second-year coach said minutes after facing Spring-Ford. "They had us on the back foot. They pushed us really hard."

Better and winner aren't synonymous, as postseason soccer often proves.

Spring-Ford bossed Tuesday night's PIAA Class 4A playoff first round match but was undone by Freedom's one and only shot on goal as Freedom claimed a 1-0 victory at J. Birney Crum Stadium in Allentown, ending the Rams' season.

Sebastian Garces got the decisive poke of a deflected shot in a big scrum in front of the Spring-Ford goal with 21.2 seconds until halftime. While the goal won't win them any style points, Freedom's defensive record earns it many points: the Patriots didn't concede a goal on the way to winning their first District 11 championship in 28 years and picked up another shutout Tuesday.

Spring-Ford vs Freedom <https://t.co/xq96aw4oH2>

– Austin Hertzog (@AustinHertzog) [November 7, 2018](#)

Freedom improves to 20-1-4 on the season and will meet District 3's Wilson, a penalty kick winner over Roman Catholic, on Saturday in the quarterfinals at a site and time

to be determined.

The best season in Spring-Ford program history ended 18-4-3 after reaching the PIAA playoffs for the first time as the fifth-place finisher in District 1.

The Rams proved to be one of the most technically skilled teams in the state, but had their difficulties against teams with a defensive identity – their undoing in the Pioneer Athletic Conference championship (Perkiomen Valley), District 1 semifinal (Central Bucks West) and Tuesday night.

“I think that game defines our season. Same thing against PV, same in district semis. We go the long road and just ... crash,” senior captain Sal Ibarra said. “I like to say that good teams find a way to win, but we would just hit that hurdle where we just could not get over it.

“We almost got there, but then that extra hump we couldn’t quite take it home.”

The Rams had eight shots to just two for Freedom and had the better of the entire match. But Patriots goalkeeper Derek Bast commanded his area excellently and was well protected by his defense. Bast was credited with six saves but was not tested enough by the Rams’ offense, which was too often intent on creating a perfect goal in a game where any goal would do – and did.

The Spring-Ford front 3 of Colin Trainor, Brett Gulati and Brandon Duke carried a threat as they usually do, but weren’t at their best on a damp, foggy night in Allentown.

“This was the best front 3 we’ve seen all season so we just wanted to limit the quality of their chances,” Reightler said. “We’ve only trailed twice all season so once we got our goal we liked our chances to hold it. This team (Freedom) has given up 8 goals in 25 games and as long as we could keep them to those half chances we could stop them.”

For all the pressure Spring-Ford generated in the final 25 minutes, it never translated into any golden chances.

“I feel like we could have made it farther,” senior defender Gabe Locke said with a rueful chuckle. “Honestly, I think we outclassed them. They got lucky on the goal, but it is what it is. We gave it our all.”

Despite the loss, Spring-Ford playing in November was a significant step.

“When we had our meetings last year, the coaches were asking us what our goals were for this season and we really overachieved them,” senior midfielder Johnny Guimaraes said. “We just wanted to win the PAC and get past the first round of districts. And the coaches were like, ‘We think you can do a lot better than that.’ But I don’t think we even saw it then.”

They eventually came to see it, even if it wasn’t as evident in the aftermath of Tuesday’s hard-luck defeat.

“This is a hard loss to swallow being that we controlled the large majority of that game,” Spring-Ford coach Brent Kissel said, “but they should hold their heads up high for what they accomplished this season. They single-handedly changed the way the state, district and PAC thinks about Spring-Ford soccer.”

NOTES >> Spring-Ford will lose senior starters Guimaraes, Ibarra, Locke, Jake Abruzzo, Aiden Hudon, goalkeeper Ray Fortebuono and reserves Nolan Schweitzer, Andrew Nicolo, Myles Bastable and Liam Hungate, but seem like a team filled with potential. “I think it sets an example for the following years,” Guimaraes said. “We’re excited to see what next year’s team can do. They’re going to be strong.”