

Northwest counts on Bono for boost in district Sophomore challenges for Sub. West scoring lead

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Tuesday, November 2, 2010 7:10 AM CDT

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David Willis doesn't see success going to Gino Bono's head.

Willis, the coach of the Northwest boys soccer team, realizes it would be easy for his sophomore standout to brag and boast. Bono is having one of the better seasons in the Suburban West. Heading into Tuesday's Class 3 district matchup against Seckman in Poplar Bluff, he had scored 18 goals, which was tied for the second best in the conference. Keith Greishaber of Marquette leads the Suburban West with 20 goals.

Bono might have eclipsed the 20-goal mark last week, but he was held out of a couple matches due to a slight concussion. Willis thought his forward might be disappointed that he didn't get to play during Northwest's 8-0 rout of Festus last Thursday. But the third-year coach said Bono wasn't worried about padding his stats. Quite the contrary, the 16-year-old videotaped the game and enjoyed his front-row seat for the Lions' senior night.

"I went over to Gino and said, 'Gino, I know you wish you could have been in there tonight. You might have scored a couple goals. I know you are probably upset you had to sit out this game,'" Willis said. "He goes, 'Coach, you know what? I had a great time tonight watching some of these seniors get to play. I had a great time watching some of them score their first goal.' He is a team kid.

"He is not a kid that beats his chest and says, 'Hey guys, look at me.'"

But, whether he wants to or not, Bono is quickly becoming a player who sticks out. The Lions will have their fingers crossed that the sophomore is healthy and on his game at this week's district tournament. Northwest opened against Seckman Tuesday and the winner advanced to the district title game Thursday. The Northwest-Seckman winner will play the survivor of the half of the bracket that includes No. 1 seed Jackson. The winner of the Poplar Bluff district will play the winner of the Lafayette district in the state sectionals on Tuesday. Parkway South is the top seed at Lafayette.

Willis has been waiting for Bono to arrive at Northwest High for a couple years. Willis, who teaches at Northwest Valley, coached the freshman squad for a couple years before taking over the varsity team three years ago. So as students passed through the halls of the middle school, Willis was on the lookout for potential talent, and Bono fit the bill.

"Gino was a kid we had our eyes on for a couple years," Willis said. "Just seeing him in gym class you knew he had something that separated himself from other kids."

From coaching Bono the last two seasons, Willis said he quickly learned the striker doesn't have an off-switch. With tenacity and speed, Bono creates many of his own scoring opportunities, usually not too far from the net.

"When the ball is around me, I will try to go after it my hardest," Bono said. "And I'm fast, so that is another plus for me."

Bono's big season comes after a freshman campaign in which he scored four goals, which Willis called "kind of remarkable" for a freshman in his first year on varsity.

But Bono has been building up to this point. He has played soccer since he was 5 and just played his first season of club ball with WC Arsenal Soccer Club last year.

The 5-foot-6, 155-pounder wants to play soccer in college, too, and said his goal is to play at the highest level possible.

"It would be nice to play up there," the soft-spoken Bono said.

Bono, however, knows there still is plenty of work to do.

He said he needs to improve on finishing his scoring opportunities, and Willis said his footwork and dribbling "aren't much better than average."

The tools of speed, strength and a good work ethic, though, have helped put Bono on the right track. A path Willis believes could lead him to having one of the best careers in Northwest history.

"No matter who he goes up against he is going to outwork that kid," Willis said. "There is something about a goal scorer being able to put the ball in the net and a lot of it is mental. He has got that. He is able to get in the zone, able to focus and put the ball away. He has a good shot.

"But the tenacity he has? when he is on the field he is an absolute animal."