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Howell North Downs House Springs 4-0 to Advance to State Final Four in Soccer

By

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The Francis Howell North Knights did what they needed to do Saturday night.

Taking on unheralded and dangerous Northwest of House Springs in the Class 4A quarterfinals at the Anheuser-Busch Conference & Sports Centre, the Knights struck for three first-half goals and coasted to a 4-0 victory.

"We knew that we had to get control early and hopefully take them out of the game," Howell North coach Vince Nowak said. "We were able to do a lot of the things we wanted to do against them and getting the goals early made things a lot easier on everyone involved."

Shaun Taggert scored twice while Matt Forrester and Mark Malloy had the other goals for Howell North. Jeremy Stacy had the shutout.

The Knights controlled play from the outset Saturday. Forrester scored off a corner-kick scramble less than 10 minutes into the game.

"Since the early part of district's Matt Forrester has been one of our best players," Nowak said. "Saturday night, he was all over the field, making plays."

With about 7 1/2 minutes to play in the half, Forrester set up Malloy for a head-shot goal. Malloy then assisted on Taggert's first goal of the game with just over 4 minutes to play, upping the lead to 3-0.

Taggert's second goal, midway through the second half, made it 4-0.

"We were able to knock the ball around and control the pace of the game most of the way," Nowak said. "Defensively, I thought we did another solid job. Northwest's a team that relies on emotion and if they'd scored or been able to stay with us early, they might've been able to build on that emotion. As it was, we were able to get the lead and basically take them out of the game early."

The Lions, who finished 17-9-1, play a physical style and ended up taking a red card late in the contest.

"Their coach and their players were extremely apologetic about the foul; they were probably as upset about it as we were," Nowak said. "They were frustrated, naturally, so we were happy just to get away with everybody healthy."

The Knights advance to Friday's semifinals, where they'll match up in the 8 o'clock game with two-time defending champion Kansas City Rockhurst. (21-3-2). The Hawklets blew out Blue Springs South 7-0 in their quarterfinal match Saturday.

CBC (20-7-4) and Oakville (27-3-1) will meet in the 6 p.m. semifinal Friday at the A-B Centre. Saturday, the winners meet at 2 p.m., with the third-place game at noon.

"We're just happy to be in a position to compete for the title," Nowak said. "We know that Rockhurst is an excellent team; they've won the last two state titles in Class 4A, they won their quarterfinal game 7-0 and they have some top-level players. But we're here, and we're excited about the opportunity."

"As I've said all along, this team has the talent and the ability to play with anyone. As long as our guys come to play, we'll be right there."