

SPORTS

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Mott accustomed to recruiting rumors



St. Joseph coach Tom Mott directs his team during a Jan. 13, 2020, game against Rightt.

St. Joseph coach deals with past transgressions

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A certain word seems to follow Tom Mott wherever he goes. Mott has made his peace with that word. Recruiting. Mott, who has coached boys basketball at St. Joseph High School since 2009, has heard the whispers in gym around the area for years. Tuesday night, the whispers turned into shouts as Rightt's

High students chanted "Where's your passport?" apparently aimed at the St. Joseph basketball players who are from out of the area. St. Joseph has a player from France and several from Puerto Rico. An international roster nothing new for Mott at St. Joseph, though the Knights usually rely on a mix of local talent to win games. Joe Walker, now a junior playing at the University of Portland, starred at St. Joseph after arriving from Carolina. Puerto Rico. There's been a slew of players from Puerto Rico, which is a U.S. territory or other countries play for the Knights under Mott.

There's been Verpas (Dominican Republic), Marcus Gonis (France) and Galery-Sadanyk (Lithuania), among a few others. Mott resigned from his coaching and athletic director position at Mission Prep in 2006 after a scandal of unreported recruiting violations. Mission Prep self-reported that Mott had made contact with a player and his family in Puerto Rico and then sent an application to that player in order to have him enroll in school and play basketball for the Knights. Mott resigned shortly after the scandal unfolded, as did the

Please see **WARRIORS**, Page B2

Vikings score in OT to defeat Pirates

Santa Ynez boys' soccer falls in first round of CIF-SS Div. 4 playoffs

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The Vikings were golden — as in Golden Goal. The Santa Maria High Vikings defeated the Santa Ynez Pirates 1-3 Wednesday night on a Golden Goal 2:36 into overtime to end the Pirates' season in the first round of the CIF Southern Section Division 4 boys' soccer playoffs at Santa Ynez High School.

"It hurts to lose," said Santa Ynez head coach Rick Joyner. "It's a tough loss."

"It was an even game all the way," said Santa Maria head coach Paul Spacey. "I feel bad for these guys because they played a great game, a monster game."

The Vikings won despite being a man down for the final 10 minutes of regulation time and into overtime.

"I really thought that once we got that red card, we were done," said Spacey.

Victor Game scored two of the Vikings' goals. Ryan Maher scored once.

"I said, 'Man, let 10 (Cano) get any space,'" said Joyner. "He got space and it is up. It's a good player."

For the Pirates, Diego Reynoso and Niko Rocha put the ball into the net.

The Pirates broke the ice with Reynoso's goal in the 14th minute of the first half.

In a corner kick, Rocha went up for a header and sent the ball to Reynoso who blasted the ball past Santa Maria goal keeper Max Nemoy.

Maher tied the game with a shot past Santa Ynez keeper Edgardo Guerrero in the 18th minute.

Santa Ynez had its own golden opportunity in the 22nd minute when the Pirates caught Nemoy out of position but the ball went inches outside the right side of the net.

Please see **PIRATES**, Page B2



Lee Wood Photo, Staff

Spartans get historic CIF win

OAHs scores first playoff win in girls soccer

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The first playoff win for an Orcutt Academy girls soccer team is in the books.

A Hope Smith goal in the third minute laid up goalkeeper Aisling Valencia halted the Spartans out with a big play in the closing minutes and Orcutt edged determined Dimba 1-0 at Orcutt Community Park Wednesday in the first round of the CIF Central Section Division 4 Playoffs.

After their historic win, the second-seeded Spartans will play at 5:30 p.m. Friday at Orcutt Community Park against No. 7 Bakersfield Christian in the quarterfinals.

"I've been on the varsity team for four years, we've been in the playoffs the last three but this is the first time we've won a playoff game," said Orcutt senior defender Elin Hopkins.

"It feels good to win, especially against a team like that." Hopkins and Valencia both indicated they thought Dimba (9-12-2) played



Orcutt Academy's Clara Luna-Vasquez (16) gets ahead of Dimba's Karan Ramirez (14).

like neither a sub-500 team nor the No. 15 seed the Empresses were.

After the third goal, the Spartans couldn't break through two effectively massed defenders in the penalty box and had a good

shot good to get a win in circumstances like that." Valencia is a junior and a three-year varsity player.

After not being able to put on much pressure with their attack the first 25 minutes of the second half, the Empresses put on a lot during the last 15.

In the last few minutes, there was a scramble for the ball in front of Valencia. "I thought the ball would be cleared out of the area," said Valencia.

After being explosively surprised that it wasn't, "I knew I just had to go out and get the ball," she said, diving and smothering it about a foot in front of her own goal.

The Orcutt defense was consistently good. The Orcutt offense consistently struggled. The Spartans seemed to frequently misjudge a bouncing ball, setting it up over their heads. They also consistently missed connections on their passes.

Once, two Orcutt attackers, going for the ball, cranked into each other. One seemed a bit shaken up after the collision, but both seemed OK afterward.

"It was a crazy game," said "Good crowd, good team. It

Please see **SPARTANS**, Page B2

Conqs edge La Puente, move into second round

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After not scoring much in the first half Wednesday night, Cabrillo scored a decent amount of points in the second.

The Comquistadores burned a nine-point early third-quarter deficit into a 34-29 lead to start the fourth quarter and best enough of it to edge La Puente 44-41 at Cabrillo in the first round of the CIF Southern Section Division 4 boys' basketball playoffs.

Cabrillo trailed 20-15 at half time and 26-17 only in the third quarter. The Comquistadores (18-10) will play in the second round Friday night at Rosemead in Canoga Park.

The Warriors finished 12-17. Alec Brown scored what would be the winning point when he

made the second of his two foul shots to put the Comp ahead 42-29 with 2:05 to play.

Lorenzo Martinez made two free throws to put the score at what would be the final count, 44-41. The Warriors still had a chance after a missed Cabrillo free throw with five seconds left, but a desperation, potential game-tying 3 didn't come close and time ran out.

Two other 's the Warriors took to try to tie the game late, also missed by wide margins.

After not finding any scoring play that consistently worked in the first half, the Comquistadores found one in the second. A Cabrillo foul-shooter would get the ball out to Jonathan Jones just outside the key and Jones would connect with the cutter for a layup.

"We work on that play a lot in practice," said Brown, who led Cabrillo with 10 points and was one of just two players from either side who scored in double figures.

"We overtook one side and when they over-play on defense, we get the ball back into the middle and go to the basket."

The score indicated that defense was what mainly won the game for the Comquistadores, and the facts bore that out. The Warriors missed a lot of off-balance shots.

"Yeah, our defense was the big thing for us," said Brown. The Comquistadores moved on despite missing a fair amount of off-balance shots themselves.

With the Comp down 26-17,



Cabrillo's Raymond Vega drives against La Puente during a CIF playoff game on Wednesday night.

Please see **CONQS**, Page B2

Rumors

From B1

school's principal.

Two CIF Central Section titles were stripped from Mission Prep.

Mott then went on to coach ABA basketball for a season and a short stint as the interim athletic director at Hancock College. Then he found his way to St. Joseph.

The recruiting violations of the past have followed him there in the form of rumors or unfounded allegations.

"People are going to bring that up until the day I die," Mott said Wednesday.

How does Mott describe his past transgressions?

"That was a long time ago, maybe 15 years," Mott said Wednesday. "I was in Puerto Rico and met some people and they wanted to come to Mission and I had already known who those people were. I haven't been to Puerto Rico since then. Pretty much anybody that comes on this campus I don't even know who they are until after they've been admitted."

Questions seem to follow the program and its roster of out-of-area players, something that many private schools deal with.

Mott says he's suited just fine to be able to handle those questions.

"Our past is our past. I've got pretty thick skin," he said. "I know whenever kids come here, whether they're from down the street or down the road or wherever, that we're going to collectively give them a great high school experience and hopefully get them on to college. From there, hopefully, they're successful."

Mott feels the private



LEN WOOD, STAFF

St. Joseph basketball coach Tom Mott directs his team during Tuesday night's game against Righetti.

school approach is often misunderstood. He says his intentions have always been to improve kids' lives and doesn't recruit students to St. Joseph to play basketball. Mott also acknowledges he was born into a position of privilege, allowing him to help those who weren't.

"We're in this business to help kids and some kids have great situations where they don't need a lot of help," Mott said. "I was blessed to have two great parents, I knew that my path was created. I knew I was going to go to a good high school, I knew I was going to go to college and I knew whatever was going to happen was going to happen."

"But for most of those kids that don't have that at home, we have so many here that people don't know about. People think St. Joe's is just a bunch of rich white kids, but people have no idea how many kids here struggle every single day, with family stuff, with financial stuff, with academic stuff"

St. Joseph principal Erinn Dougherty says the school follows a standard admissions process. Dougherty says she handles all admission decisions.

"We're not a neighborhood school," Dougherty said Wednesday. "Every kid that we bring in we bring in, whether it's a student from Santa Ynez or San Luis Obispo or from wherever. You apply online then you have an interview with me. I do a family interview with every single student that is admitted to this school. Every single one. There's not one student, regardless of what their home address was at the time that they applied, who doesn't interview with me."

Dougherty said students meet with the admissions team to do paperwork.

"The next step is that I interview you, whether it's in person or via Skype if you're not readily available to come in and meet," she said. "Then I make a determination based

upon the file and the interview."

Mott said most public schools have exchange students from other countries and many play high school sports.

"If you're a public school and you're getting an international student, they can only stay for one year because it's a different visa that they get," Mott said. "When Erinn talks to (prospective students) one of the questions is, 'Are you planning on staying for graduation?'"

"I didn't accept any student who doesn't want to stay for graduation," Dougherty added. "There is an adjustment period, there is a lot of love that we put in as a school family, there's a lot we put in and just for a year doesn't make sense to expend that."

Mott maintains he's proud of his work as a coach and administrator at Mission Prep and St. Joseph. One of his proudest moments, he says, is helping a local student-athlete, who Mott wanted to be unnamed, make it to college.

"Nobody wanted him," Mott said of a recent graduate who is now playing basketball in college. "He had some definite issues. His dad passed away, his family life wasn't very good. He ends up coming here and so many people helped him along the journey and the fact that he's in college, he's going to get his AA and he's going to get a scholarship."

"If you asked anybody in Santa Maria four years ago if that would've been possible, not one person would've said it was, probably myself included. We're in education to help kids no matter where they come from."