



Kickers U-17 wins Traverse City Cherryland Tournament

On the weekend of August 6th, the Kickers sent five youth teams to Traverse City to compete in the 16th Annual Cherryland Tournament. All our teams played well and we came home with a winning record as a club. The U-17 Boys team, coached by Kurt Seiberling and Robert Becker, came home with the championship trophy. This was a great triumph because, after the 1st game, it didn't look as though they would win anything.

For their first game, the U-17 boys played Grand Valley Premier. This team has six players that make a 280 mile round trip three times each week from Traverse City to Grand Rapids to play on the team. Grand Valley Premier is the #3 ranked team in the State, and they beat our boys badly by a score of 9-0. As a coach, about the only thing you can tell a team after a loss like that is to forget about it (especially the score), and try to regroup.

Well, the boys did just that, and came away with a 2-1 victory over Sault Ste. Marie to reach the semi-finals on Sunday. Strong defensive play and two early goals was the key to this victory.

For the semi-finals, we faced our old rivals, the San Marino Cougars. They beat us on both our last two trips to Traverse City. This time, however, the Kickers prevailed with a well-deserved 2-1 win. The boys dominated play and wore down the San Marino attack with a smothering defense. In fact, the Cougars could only muster their lone goal just before time expired. This earned us a spot in the finals against the Grand Valley Premier, the same team that beat us 9-0 the day before.

I must admit, at this point, leaving the tournament to get a jump on the weekend traffic did enter our minds. But, as game time approached, the Kickers sideline started to fill up with family, friends, current and former players. Günter Huss and sons Mark & Kenny came to cheer their

old club on. This time the boys didn't disappoint the crowd of approximately 200 - 250.

At the 10-minute mark, our opponents made it 1-0, but the Kickers held on until halftime. When the 2nd half whistle sounded, the U-17's came on strong with a flurry of chances and, before long, it was 1-1 thanks to a beautiful goal from Kevin Becker from just outside the penalty area. The game went back and forth with both teams creating numerous chances. With 10 minutes left in the game, Grand Valley scored to make it 2-1. But, as Grand Valley celebrated what they thought would be the game winner, Matt Tepatti streaked down the right side of the field, beating 2 defenders, and putting a low, hard shot into the side netting for a 2-2 tie.

Since regulation time ended in a tie, we were headed for overtime. Throughout the overtime, both teams traded chances and each goalie was tested. In the end, it was still 2-2. This forced the game into penalty shots and was a far cry from the 9-0 trouncing that we took the day before.

Both teams were still tied after the first group of five shooters, so we needed to go to sudden-death penalty shots. After each team's 6th shooter made their shots, the 7th shooter for Grand Valley, an all-state



soccer player from Traverse City, sent his shot five feet wide of the net. With the crowd screaming, Andrew Zielinski walked into the penalty area, placed the ball down, and drilled the ball into the top corner of the net for a 3-2 Kicker victory. The entire Kicker sideline erupted in celebration, while our opponents wondered what went wrong.

We play as a team. When we win, we win as a team. When we lose, it's the coach's fault. Having coached most of these boys since they were 8 years old, I have never been more proud of a team than I was that Sunday afternoon. Thanks again, boys. *Coach* 🌸