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ASHEBORO - For Southwestern Randolph High School graduates Fernando Hernandez and Aaron Avina and Randleman High School graduate Owen Leonard, there was one last time on the pitch before heading to their respective colleges.

And the Randolph County trio took full advantage.

Hernandez scored twice in being named the most valuable player, Avina had two assists and Leonard played solidly in 47 minutes of action to help guide the West team to a 3-1 victory over the East at the N.C. Coaches Association East-West All-Star Soccer Game played July 21 at Truist Point Stadium in High Point.

Hernandez and Avina were playing their final high school soccer game after guiding the Cougars to the NCHSAA state 4-A championship last fall.



Fernando Hernandez.

"It was really exciting," said Fernandez, who is headed to Chowan. "I played with a lot of great people and met a lot of great people. I was able to play aside my teammate one more time. We have been teammates a long time."

Hernandez scored in the ninth minute off an Avina assist and then put the game away with a goal in the 72nd minute off another assist by Avina.

"I knew every time I gave him the ball I would get it back," Hernandez said. "I knew this game was going to be something where I could prove myself again and I proved myself. But I couldn't have done it without my teammates."

The win for the West team was the first since 2019 and broke a five-game unbeaten streak for the East, which won three of the five games in the 2020s with two games ending in ties. It was the 34th edition of the annual all-star game with the East now leading the series, 16-12-6.

"It was a great game, last night was a Southwest night," Avina said the day after the victory. "It really meant a lot to me. I've only been playing for two years. I loved playing with all of them. I knew I could find him (Hernandez) at any given moment."

Avina is heading to Lees-McRae to continue his soccer career.

Former SWR head coach Jimmy Walker, who resigned after his team finished 27-1 this past season, said he was proud to see the contributions his players made in the all-star event.

"I felt like a proud papa bear," Walker said. "You have the best of the best out there and your two guys shine the brightest. It was an incredible night."

RHS' Leonard was also a key to the victory, which saw the East with a 10-9 shot advantage. He said despite just two workouts on Monday and one Tuesday morning, there was a lot of chemistry on the West team.



Aaron Avina.



Owen Leonard.

"Only a few had been friends before," said Leonard, who is heading to Pfeiffer after becoming RHS' all-time scoring leader this past season. "We all hung out at the hotel talking, it meant a lot. The chemistry was amazing. I met some really great guys who I will probably be friends with for a long time."

Hernandez saw that chemistry as well.

"The first day there, we all connected very well," he said.

"We talked a lot and created a family there. It was an amazing group of boys on and off the field. We knew we would be a good team and come out on top."

Avina agreed.

"We were always together," he said. "We were like a family already. When we would go to practice, it was always fun."

And the entire state was able to see once again just how successful soccer in Randolph County is.