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By Dennis Garcia

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ASHEBORO - It was a familiar scene for the Asheboro High School soccer team after a home win over Ledford on Oct. 23. As the players and coaching staff met in a circle after the 4-2 victory over the Panthers, head coach Nick Arroyo could be heard shouting "That's four in a row."

Indeed it was as the Blue Comets captured their fourth straight Mid-Piedmont Conference championship. And when AHS put the finishing touches on the league season with a 4-1 win over Montgomery Central earlier this week, this campaign marked the third time in those four championship years the Blue Comets finished undefeated in the league.

"That was the first goal when the season started," Arroyo said as he prepared his team for one final regular season game that was added to the schedule prior to the state playoffs. "We're taking it one game at a time."

Asheboro is 21-2 and will host Mooresville Tuesday. The Blue Comets are seeded No. 1 in the West Region heading into that contest. If the Blue Comets wouldn't have added that game, it would have been a nearly two-week period in which the Blue Comets waited for the playoffs to begin. Because of the devastation suffered in the Western part of the state due to Hurricane Helene, the NCHSAA gave teams an extra week to schedule games before the start of the playoffs.

"We wanted to keep the guys in game shape and we're number one in the West Region right now (RPI standings) with Enka and Reynolds right behind us and they still have games to play," Arroyo said. "We needed to play a team with a winning record."

Mooresville is 11-8-3.



*Asheboro coach Nick Arroyo celebrating the fourth straight conference championship by the Blue Comets. Photo provided.*



*Asheboro senior Cam Letterlough is among the top scorers in the nation. Photo provided.*

The Blue Comets have experienced both ends of the emotional spectrum in recent playoff performances. Two years ago, AHS advanced to the regional finals before falling to Hickory. Last year, the Blue Comets suffered a heartbreaking 1-0 loss to Stuart Cramer in the second round.

"It ended before it should have," Arroyo said about last year's season. "This year we took the approach of focusing on, first, every individual game in the non conference season, and then every single conference game, one at a time. We had to stop looking ahead. Don't worry about games happening in November. Worry about the game that you are playing. We are focused on the game ahead."

The Blue Comets are led offensively by senior Cam

Letterlough, whose 62 goals are the second highest in the nation. Eli Baker from Salem High School (Illinois) has 68.

AHS' Diego Bustamante has added 25 goals and 25 assists and Ozmar Martinez and Cristian Raygadas have each added 20 points on the season. Daniel Gutierrez, Carlos Castaneda and Alexander Diaz have added 18 each. Braulio Gutierrez is one of the leaders of a strong defensive unit.



*Asheboro senior Diego Bustamante leads the Blue Comets in assists. Photo provided.*

Asheboro has outscored opponents 130-40 on the season and they accomplished this facing a very difficult schedule. The Blue Comets have played some of the top-ranked teams in the state.

"You want to build a schedule that will test you, but not completely break you," Arroyo said. "Some of the games didn't go our way, but you want to play the top hitters who we can learn the most from."

The only losses AHS suffered this year were to Hoggard, the number one 4-A team in the East Region and to West Forsyth, the number one 4-A team in the West Region.



*Senior Braulio Gutierrez is a defensive leader for Asheboro. Photo provided.*

"One game at a time," Arroyo said. "That is where our focus is."

It has worked out very well so far.

