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The Traip Academy boys soccer team celebrates with its championship trophy after defeating Piscataquis, 5-1, in the Class C state final on Saturday afternoon in Bath, Maine. It is the first state title in boys soccer for Traip, which entered the regional tournament as the No. 8 seed.

Photo by Ryan O'Leary

Traip wins boys soccer state title

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BATH, Maine - Traip Academy sophomore Brennen Connor was slumped to one knee on the Ranger sideline. He repeatedly pulled his jersey to the top of his forehead, catching it in his mouth after it slid down his face. In front of him was his coach, pacing the sideline, a disbelieving smile covering his face.

The officials had just ruled that a ball that struck Connor's hand in the penalty box was an intentional disruption to a Piscataquis scoring bid. Connor was given a red card and

disqualified from the game.

After senior Roy Burdin of fifth-seeded Piscataquis slipped the ensuing penalty kick under the dive of Traip goalie Connor Kuehl, the Class C boys soccer state championship game was tied, 1-1.

The Rangers, who had dominated the first half of play, maintaining a 1-0 lead from the 21:22 mark, would now have to play the final 50 minutes of the game a player down.

But for a Traip team that thought it was better than its No. 8 seed, that overcame a late goal by St. Dominic in the regional semifinals and survived 14 rounds of penalty kicks in the West final at North Yarmouth, Saturday's second half was a walk in the park.

Juniors Tyler Metevier and Trevor Higgins, at times working against three or four Piscataquis defenders, manufactured four goals in the first 20 minutes of the second half. Three of those goals came from the foot of Metevier, who after each was mobbed by his teammates, a celebration the Ranger boys would repeat throughout the day.

When the final whistle blew, the eighth-seeded Rangers (14-5) had defeated Eastern Maine champion Piscataquis, 5-1, and for the first time in school history were crowned Class C state champs. Piscataquis finished its season at 12-5-1.

"There's just a little sub-plot every game," said Traip coach Paul Marquis on the resiliency his team showed in the tournament. "The kids just have that never-say-die, never-say-lose attitude. We've known we have the technical ability. We just showed we have more heart than anyone we've gone through."

"My hat's off to them," said Piscataquis coach Max Webb. "(Marquis) must have had a better halftime speech than I did."

The 10 Ranger starters, inspired by the man-disadvantage, struck early in the second half €" and then often.

Just over two minutes in, captain Ryan Birse launched a cross from the deep right corner. The cross was directed to Metevier by the head of Higgins, and after an initial struggle to gain control, Metevier converted, finding the high left corner.

"The first half I was a little fluttered, I wasn't as relaxed," Metevier said. "I stuck my leg out, tapped it to my foot. I just saw the net and tapped it in."

About a minute later, Higgins found Metevier again. From 20 yards out, Metevier placed a perfect shot past the dive of Piscataquis goalie Ryan Martell (five saves). And despite having an extra attacker on the field, the Pirates suddenly found themselves struggling to stay in the game.

"We've said for a long time, everything that happens on the field, let's make it like we wanted it to happen," Marquis said. "We didn't want to go a man down, but (we said), • Hey, we'll handle it."

Ahead 3-1, with the clock winding inside 25 minutes to play in the game, the relentless Ranger offensive attack put the game away. Sophomore forward Jack Masury dropped a pass off to Metevier, who powered home another long shot. And close after, Higgins headed a long throw from Ryan Birse inside the right post to go ahead by four.

"I came into this game knowing it was the last game I was going to play with seven of my favorite seniors," Higgins said. "And I was just like, • You know what, let's not end it with a

loss. We're going to put this one down and bring (the trophy) back to Traip.' And we did."

"The seniors are great," Metevier said. "They're always pushing us. We're pushing them. You couldn't ask for anything better."

The offensive efforts of Metevier and Higgins helped send Traip's seven seniors out on top.

Along with Kuehl (seven saves), Tyler Read, Alex Bateman and Travis Jones, the Rangers will graduate fiery forward Tom Roots (assist), and the duo of Matt Downs and Birse in the midfield.

"So far, in my life, this is the best I've ever felt," said Downs. "We love each other. We play together. Right now is just priceless for us.

"Tyler Metevier and Trevor Higgins, the two juniors, gave us seniors a going-away present. I mean five goals €" you couldn't ask for anything better than that."

That senior core, who have played together since U-10 town soccer, joined the rest of their teammates for one last time to pass out hugs, take pictures, and hoist the championship trophy.

"Since we were U-10 kids we've been saying we want the state championship before we graduate high school," Birse said. "It feels so good to finally get it on your last year."

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