

SPORTS

SECTION C • WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2013 • VICTOR VALLEY & THE HIGH DESERT

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ALL TO THEMSELVES

AAE claims first outright boys soccer title

By KYLE GLASER /
STAFF WRITER

ORO GRANDE • The Academy for Academic Excellence boys soccer team had to do some soul searching three weeks ago after a surprising loss to Riverside Prep threw a wrench into its quest for an undefeated league season.

The Knights had a chance to make up for that hiccup Tuesday afternoon, and they didn't miss it.

AAE rallied from an early deficit and held off a late charge to defeat the Silver Knights 2-1 and clinch the first outright Cross Valley League title in school history.

"They stayed composed," AAE coach Lucas Kim said. "The boys just wanted it so bad it didn't matter what happened in the beginning.... Composure, discipline and consistency, those are the three things we really emphasize in our training, and it paid off today."

The Knights (12-5-1, 7-1-1 CVL), who reached the quarterfinals last season, will have the league's top seed when the playoffs begin.

"It's a good one for the Knights. I've been waiting for it my whole life," said goalkeeper Dylan Stolp, who made eight saves in the victory.

Riverside Prep (10-4-2, 5-3-1 CVL) would have clinched a share of the league title and the top playoff seed if it had won.

The Silver Knights went ahead when Miguel Marin took a pass in the middle of the field from Israel Orozco and fired a laser from 25 yards out into the upperright corner of the net in the 25th minute.

Rather than hang their heads or get frustrated, AAE responded. Bryce Albert ensured the Knights wouldn't trail at the half when he took a pass from Kyle Rodriguez in the middle of the goalie box and found the back of the net in injury time.

Rodriguez gave AAE the lead five minutes into the second half when he took the ball in the left corner, beat two defenders along the goal line, and after his initial shot was saved, stuffed home the rebound just inside the post.

"Last time we played them, they scored first and our heads went down and they scored again and again," Rodriguez said. "In this game we knew we had to come back."

AAE had to sweat out the final 20 minutes. Riverside Prep junior Rafael Zavala had a free kick in the middle from 20 yards out but shot it over the crossbar, and two headers off corner kicks just missed the net.



Then in injury time, Zavala took another free kick from 20 yards in the middle and the shot went off the hands of Stolp over his head and appeared to be heading into the net for the game-tying goal. But instead it hit the crossbar and fell back into Stolp's grasp.

"That seems to be our luck in the four losses we have," Silver Knights coach Casey Kemble said. "We hit the post numerous times — just not quite getting the bounces in the right way."

Riverside Prep didn't get another chance after that, and AAE celebrated wildly as the final whistle sounded.

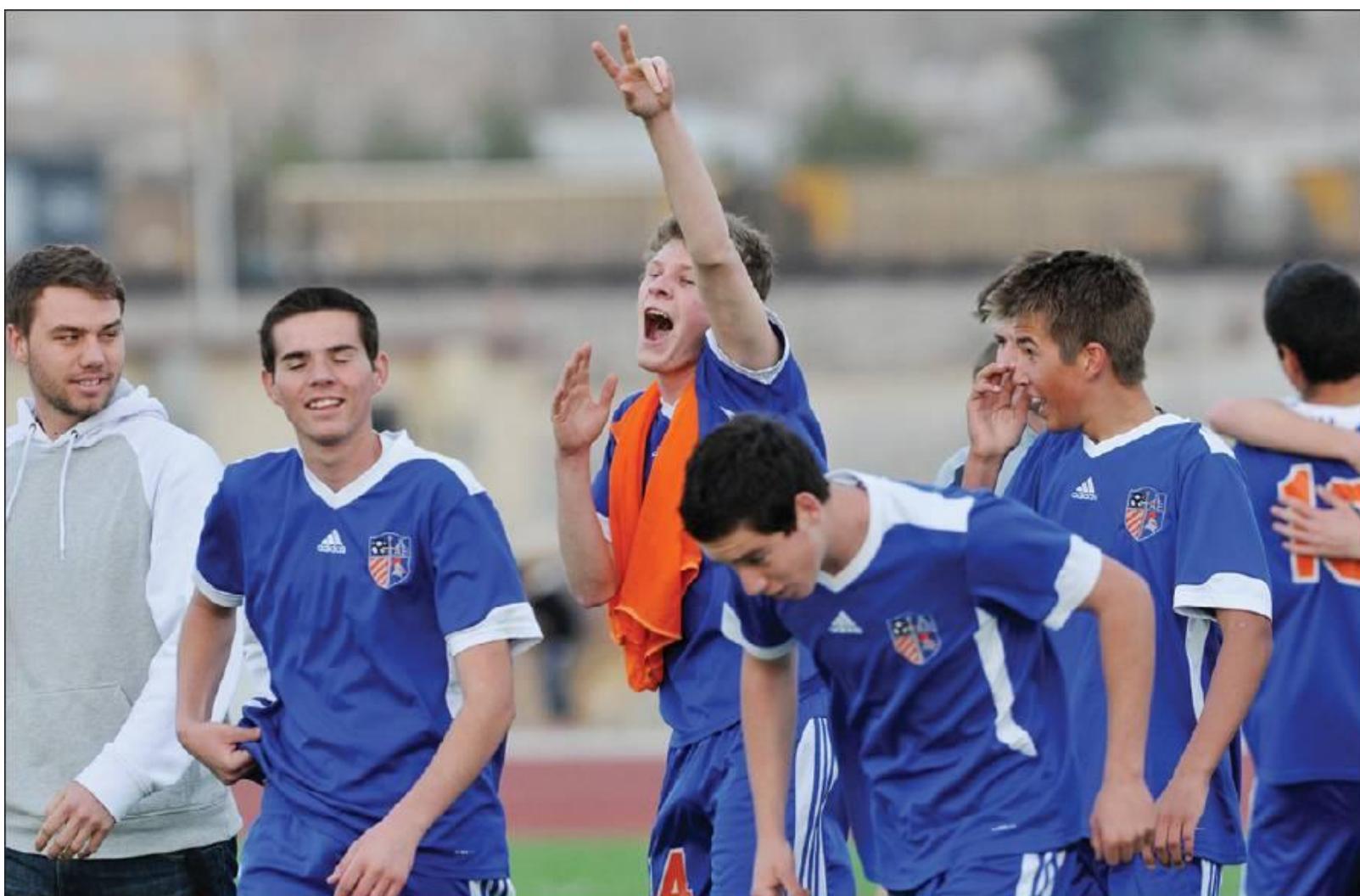
"Lucas (Kim) said we had to leave behind a legacy," Rodriguez said. "Our school has never won a soccer banner and last year we came close, so we wanted to leave behind that legacy. Our names will always be there and it feels awesome."

Both teams will find out their seedings for the Division 6 playoffs when the brackets are released Feb. 11.

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DAVID PARDO, DAILY PRESS

ALONE AT THE TOP: Academy for Academic Excellence players celebrate on the field after beating Riverside Prep on Tuesday afternoon in Oro Grande to secure the outright Cross Valley League boys soccer title.





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JUST ENOUGH: AAE's Kyle Rodriguez, left, scores during the second half of Tuesday's win over Riverside Prep.

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