

Lassen soccer teams going to North Section finals

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Lassen High School's soccer teams embark on Northern Section title quests this week from different perspectives. The girls enter the playoffs after securing their fifth straight Westside League championship, while the boys slipped in by finishing third in the WSL.

"We're proud of winning another league title, but our work is not over yet," said Lassen head coach Steve Datema, who is in search of a fourth consecutive section crown. "Anything can happen in the playoffs. We have to take it one game at a time."

Datema's crew will host the third-place team from the Sacramento Valley League at 3:15 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 15 at Riverside Park in Susanville. At press time, Lassen Athletic Director Greg Dickerson said Pierce would most likely be the girls' first-round opponent.

A win keeps the Grizzlies at home for the second round on Tuesday, Feb. 20.

Datema said he is uncertain of what awaits his team.

"I haven't heard much about the competition, but we just need to stay focused on what we want to do as team. These girls have come a long way this season. If we play our game, we have a good shot at another title," he said.

Will snow and cold weather play a factor?

"I think so. The last thing those teams from the valley want to do is come up here and play. Especially if it's cold and there's snow on the ground," Datema said.

The girls downed Orland 1-0 to finish with a 8-1-1 league record. Keli Sloan scored on an assist from Courtney Oates.

Lassen's boys will have to play on the road to win a fifth consecutive section championship. They travel to Colusa on Feb. 15, and with a victory, will head to Winters on Feb. 20.

"It's going to be a battle, but I'm optimistic about our chances," Lassen head coach Matti Ripatti said. "The team is playing much better than they did at the beginning of the season.

"The boys are in better condition, are more confident and are hungry to prove themselves. They've really matured as a team. In the last couple of wins, I think they realized that they can beat anyone if they continue to work together and execute."

Ripatti points to Lassen's 1-0 win over Gridley. The Bulldogs, a favorite to win a section title, entered the game undefeated after dominating their opponents.

"Our defense was excellent in that game. The boys executed the game plan perfectly and came out of the game with a real confidence," he said

Lassen ended the regular season with a 4-1 win over Orland. Dillon Moore, the team's leading scorer, had a hat trick and Scott Gill added a score.

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"That was a good game for us. Hopefully we can play like that against Colusa," Ripatti said.

The Grizzlies finished behind Gridley and Corning respectively in the WSL.

The third-place finish mark the end of a string of four straight league championships.