

Former Waltham High soccer players reunite at Mass Bay Community College

By **Scott Souza**

Wicked Local Waltham

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Khari Roulhac recommends this.



The talent was always there on the soccer field. The potential was also there in the classroom.

What was needed for several recent Waltham High boys soccer players was a place where one set of skills could be highlighted while the other was fostered.

This past fall, Mass Bay Community College became that place for eight former Hawks who helped the Wellesley school reach the final of the Massachusetts Community College Tournament and the semifinals of the National Junior College Athletic Association Region XXI Tournament.

Freshman midfielder Edson Marques, freshman forward Kleymar Garcia, both of Waltham, were named First Team All-Region and freshman midfielder Josue Teo, also of Waltham, was named a Second Team All-Region along with Watertown High alumnus Hyak Kaya. Sophomore Eddie Lopez, freshman Erick Garcia, sophomore midfielder Christian Garcia, freshman Edgar Molina and freshman forward Luckens Aristide were also welcomed additions for Mass Bay coach Ernest Cimino this season.

“They were all a very big part of what worked for us this year,” Cimino said. “They came in and really worked at it. A lot of the guys here have to work too, then they have their practices and games. So kudos to them this year. They did a yeoman’s job.”

Cimino said the Waltham connection began through Waltham youth soccer coach Dan Iodice, who told Cimino that he had several impressive players on his Under-19 club squad who didn’t have a lot of direction when it came to their post-Waltham High plans. Cimino happily gave them a try on the field as the athletic program helped them get a second chance in the classroom.

It’s a familiar story at Mass Bay where athletics are used to help students make the transition from high school to trade degrees and four-year colleges.

“What Mass Bay gives kids is an opportunity to focus on the right curriculum for them,” Cimino said. “You have a lot of really good athletes who, for whatever reason, sometimes had a hard time keeping their head on straight in high school. Sometimes there are family issues, for some of them English is a second language, but this school gives them a chance to get back into school and gain some credits that then transfer to almost any school in the area.”

The lure, for many, is the chance to keep playing sports. For the Waltham contingent, that lure was enhanced with the chance to keep playing soccer together.

“I know for a fact it helped them,” Cimino said. “Then you have them together and you put them on a team with 18 players on the five more reserves, and you have a whole team of students from various backgrounds. There is a lot of diversity in the program and that helps build a broader sense of community. These student grow exponentially beyond just the sport of soccer.”

Many of the WHS alumni were on the Hawk team that three years ago made the state tournament before suffering a tough loss to a very talented Medford squad in the playoff opener. The following year, they returned with high expectations for a season that ended in disappointment when injuries and a late-season forfeit due to card violations landed them just short of the postseason.

That might have been the end of the road for many of them in organized soccer without Mass Bay.

“When a lot of these kids go through the graduation process they don’t know what their options are,” Cimino said. “A situation like this makes it possible for them to get an education. I have an assistant coach, Julie Nelson, who works with these kids off the field and helps them succeed in class.

“The athletic department here puts a lot of pressure on the coaches to stay on top of the boys. I know all their transcripts and all their grades. For some of them who might be having a hard time, I am already on their cases for next year.”

Cimino said the former Hawks have made the adjustment well, with a couple of them taking on a leadership role within the team.

“One of the guys who surprised me a lot this year was Eddie Lopez,” the coach said. “He really bought into the team concept and developed a great work ethic with his discipline and focus. He really got this group together. And he was a guy who struggled early on. But he got his grades where they needed to be and was a key guy for us.”

Cimino said he is most excited that 14 of his players this season – including five of the eight Waltham players – were freshmen, meaning he has a lot of returning talent to the two-year program next fall.

In the meantime, he will be looking to fill in the voids left by the graduating sophomores. Based on his success with Waltham High players so far he is hoping that is a pipeline that continues to flow in future years.

“I strongly encourage players from Waltham who have an interest in playing soccer in college to contact me at the school,” he

said. "We can make it possible for them to keep playing and get an education. We have a lot to offer."

(Scott Souza can be reached at 781-398-8006 or ssouza@wickedlocal.com.)

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