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No chance of easy start for Mount Pearl

By JOHN BROWNE, The Telegram

Is Mount Pearl's provincial men's soccer team on the verge of establishing a dynasty or just a very good team that mostly underachieves?

Tonight's opening game in the Molson Challenge Cup championship round between Mount Pearl That Pro Look/Molson and St. Lawrence Laurentians could go a long way in answering that question.

Game time is 6:30 p.m. at King George V field.

"We know the St. Lawrence match is going to be a tough game. If both teams come to play, it's probably going to be decided by which ever team gets the break," says Mount Pearl coach Walt Mavin.

The Mount Pearl coach says there are areas he feels his team can exploit.

"There are some things we've noticed about St. Lawrence, but obviously I don't want to reveal that," Mavin said with a chuckle.

"I'm sure there are things they've learned in playing us five times this year as well," he noted.

"However," Mavin added, "we've had to go the long route the past few years and we have no intention of doing it this year."

The winner of tonight's opener advances directly to the Sunday's final.

The other match tonight has the Jon Hawco-led Holy Cross/The Keg playing defending champion Marystown United at 8:30 p.m.

The winner of that match plays the loser of the St. Lawrence-Mount Pearl game in Saturday's 4 p.m. semifinal.

Mavin says there's cause for optimism based on the season series with St. Lawrence, even though the Laurentians won three out of five games.

In second-round play, Mount Pearl beat St. Lawrence 4-2 and lost 2-0. During the first round, Mount Pearl defeated St. Lawrence on a golden goal before losing 5-0 and 2-1.

Mavin says the 5-0 loss in St. Lawrence in July was a "turning point" for his club.

"On the day, I was concerned, but looking back at the full season, we probably gained more from that loss than we did from the one-goal loss to them," Mavin said.

"It was a point in the season when we may have been taking things a little for granted, and I include myself as coach in that. They got a couple of goals on their first few scoring chances and that was the game. But that big loss was a sort of turning point for us and we have no thoughts of that happening again. We don't even talk about that game," he said.

"We took a number of things from that match and, if anything, that loss may have been coming for a couple of weeks and it just so happened it happened in St. Lawrence."

Mavin can probably take a share of credit for the team's development from that point on.

"This will be the third straight year St. Lawrence and ourselves have met in the 1-2 game (St. Lawrence won 2-1 last year), which speaks for our consistency," the Mount Pearl mentor noted.

"If you look at this club, we're still essentially a young team with eight or nine players available from the Summer Games team for the future.

"While the current team is young, we do have experience of playing in big games. This weekend won't be anything new for our players," Mavin said.

"St. Lawrence also has a lot of players who have been in this situation before and know what it takes to win."

In fact, Mavin said everyone has respect for this year's final four.

"No one is underestimating anybody."

The Mount Pearl coach says his team won't change a whole lot for the playoffs.

"You'd like to think that at this time of the season with the players' timing, focus, concentration and quality of play all over the field, that if you get four or five corners, you will create scoring chances from at least three of the five.

"I don't think either team will create an over abundance of scoring chances. I think the team that wins will be the team that has the composure to take advantage of the chances it gets. And, on the flip side, a successful team will limit scoring chances of the opponent."

Mount Pearl is healthy with the exception of one veteran, but Mavin won't reveal his name for the record.

Mavin and his charges seem destined to run off a string of championships before this decade is over because of the club's pool of young talent seems bottomless.

But the team's heart and ability to rise to the pressure situations will begin to be questioned if they come up short again this weekend.

When asked if his team doesn't win the championship will it have underachieved given its talent level, Mavin replied: "I guess there's a fine line between winning and underachieving. If we played really well and didn't win or we lost by one goal, did we underachieve?"

"If we have a very strong game and the other team happens to get a bounce (to win), there's nothing much you can do about that. Sometimes soccer is just a game of inches."