



Technical Report

This report was prepared to provide a record of the 2009 NCAA Men's Soccer Division I College Cup Final Four. We hope that by offering some data, reflections and opinions, we may give technicians food for thought. By helping to detect trends and analyzing the present condition of the game, we may all play a role in the future enhancement of the competition.

How Goals Are Scored

This year's NCAA Division I Men's Soccer College Cup saw 120 goals find the back of the net -16 more than last year. These goals came from a variety of different sources including:

RE-STARTS: Every re-start near the opponent's goal should result in a dangerous scoring chance. It is a direct opportunity to get a good look at the target whether it comes from a corner kick, a penalty kick, direct kick, indirect kick or even a long throw-in. While no goals in the 2009 NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Final Four came by way of a re-start during regulation or overtime, the second semi-final game featuring North Carolina vs. Akron as well as the Virginia vs. Akron final was ultimately decided by penalty kicks.

GK ERROR: A costly drop, fumble or poor clearance by the goalkeeper that allows the ball to remain in play close to goal is a delight for attacking players.



PHOTO: Jim Daves

BALLS BEHIND THE BACK LINE: In the first semi-final match featuring the University of Virginia vs. Wake Forest, UVA reserve forward Owenby was able to outrace Wake defenders Opara and Arena onto a direct long ball from Villanueva that got in behind them.

FAILURE TO CLEAR: Any loose ball in the penalty area is considered a potential scoring chance if not cleared out of danger. The opening goal of the tournament (Virginia vs. Wake Forest) originated from an insufficient clearance from Wake Forest. Hunter Jumper controlled the ball on the left side and dribbled towards the middle of the field where the weight of his forward pass allowed Villanueva the

opportunity to create the rest. Wake Forest's tying goal in the same game originated from a similar failure to clear from Virginia. The weak

clearance allowed Wake's DaLuz the opportunity to settle the ball 30 yards out from goal and slip Corbin Bone the ball on the sideline.

CROSSES: They can cause so much trouble for defenders and goalkeepers. Many times, if the cross is placed correctly, weighted properly and runs are timed efficiently, a cross can render defenders and goalkeepers helpless. A great example came in the first semi-final match-up as Wake outside midfielder Norman crossed a perfectly timed ball into the path of forward Schilawski for a shot that missed just wide of Restrepo's near post. In addition, the fifth minute of the final saw UVA's Bates get his head on a dangerous cross from left back Jumper.

INDIVIDUAL EFFORT: Perhaps the most exciting thing to see in soccer is a player creating his own chance by beating a defender with the dribble or creating a chance from nothing to score an amazing goal. Two of the three goals from the Final Four as goals can be classified as an individual effort. UVA's Villanueva created a scoring chance with his clever dribble and shot from close range. Tchani was there to finish the rebound. Corbin Bone's stroll into the UVA penalty area on the dribble allowed him to get the toe-poke past Restrepo for Wake's goal.

The Semi-Finals

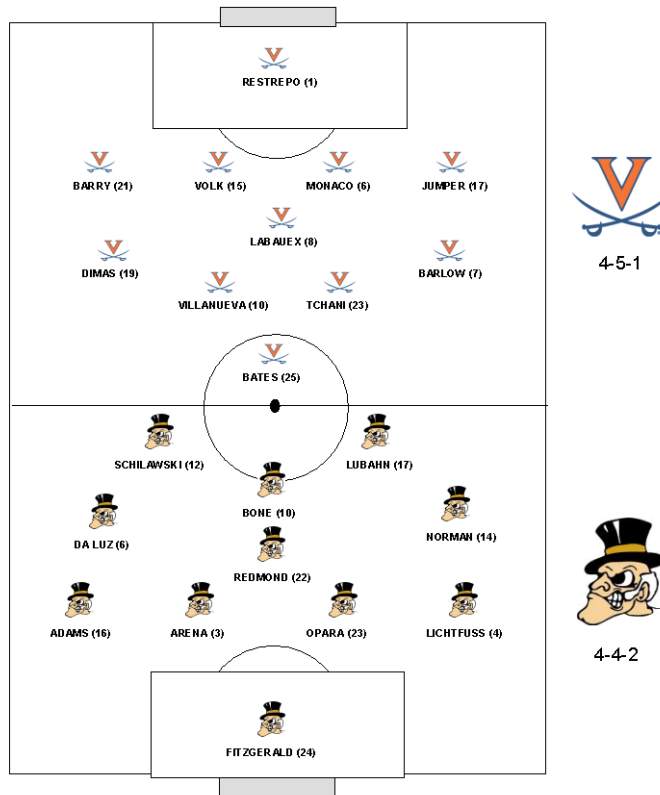
VIRGINIA vs. WAKE FOREST

In the first of two semi-final matches, Wake Forest and the University of Virginia met for the third time in the 2009 season. Both teams play in arguably the most competitive conference in the country – the Atlantic Coast Conference – with four of the previous eight NCAA Division I National Championship Tournaments being won by an ACC team. In fact, at least one ACC team has reached the final four dating back the 2001 where the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill lifted the trophy.

Wake Forest came out in a 4-4-2 formation with the midfield arranged in a diamond. The University of Virginia lined up in a 4-5-1 with one holding midfielder serving as a screen in front of the back four and two attacking central midfielders. Wake set the pace in the first half by spraying the ball around and keeping the majority of the possession. UVA struggled to connect passes and created few decent scoring chances from the run of play. One came from an attacking run by right back Shawn Barry, who delivered a delicate cross to the back post for a header late in the half. And the other, UVA's only real first half chance on goal, came from a re-start – a long range blast from Greg Monaco off a throw-in.

Wake, on the other hand, dominated play creating several chances. In the 12th minute, Lubahn hit the crossbar with a left footed chip. A few minutes later, Bone's shot from the top of the box forced UVA goalkeeper Restrepo to make a diving save. The best chance of the half came in the 21st minute when Norman and Schilawski combined on the right side of the box. Norman's final crossing pass on the ground found the right foot of a streaking Schilawski. The shot was hit hard but just wide of Restrepo's near post. After taking heavy fire, UVA were relieved to hear the whistle for halftime.

The break allowed UVA to gather their forces and they were first on the board 10 minutes into the second half. Following a short clearance by Wake Forest, Hunter Jumper settled the ball on the left side of midfield. After dribbling inside past the defender, Jumper slipped a delicate ball forward to a driving Villanueva. Another Wake Forest defender charged at Villanueva who cleverly dodged him to blast a left footed shot across goalkeeper Fitzgerald toward the far post. The Wake GK could only deflect the close range shot which conveniently fell to the foot of UVA's Tony Tchani for the one-touch finish. UVA nearly doubled their lead less than three minutes later. A free kick in behind the Wake Forest back line found a wide open Monaco for a touch at the near post, but could not find its way past Fitzgerald.



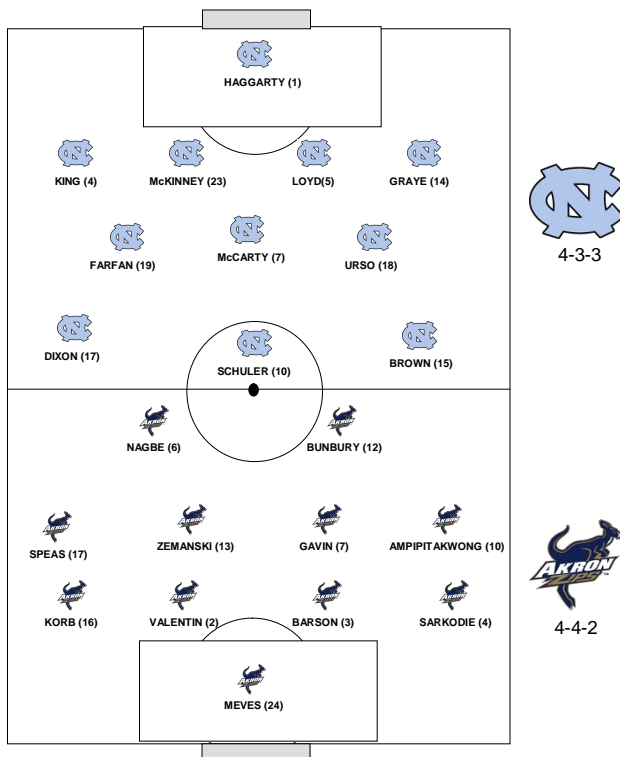
In the 60th minute, Wake Forest was presented with a great look at goal on a second ball from their corner kick. UVA failed to clear, but Schilawski's right footed blast sailed high. Seven minutes later, DaLuz came close to scoring when his shot skimmed the paint off the top of the crossbar. Wake's efforts were finally rewarded shortly thereafter when Bone danced along the end line for a deflected toe poke goal that appeared to catch UVA asleep in the back. 1-1 was the score with 20 minutes left in regulation. Both UVA and Wake Forest continued to generate half-chances but the game would head into overtime to determine who would advance to the 2009 NCAA College Cup Final.

A mere three minutes into the overtime (Golden Goal) period, UVA's Villanueva connected with late game reserve forward Owenby on a 60 yard direct ball over the top of defenders Arena and Opara. After beating the two defenders in a footrace, Owenby lofted his first-time shot over the Wake Forest GK Fitzgerald. Virginia was on their way to the title game.

The Semi-Finals

NORTH CAROLINA vs. AKRON

In the second semi-final, UNC faced Akron, the undefeated #1 seed, to determine who would play UVA for the NCAA Championship. UNC lined up in a 4-3-3 formation with 2 attacking midfielders, 1 high center forward and 2 wide attackers. Akron came out in a 4-4-2. On paper, Ampaipitakwong and Speas show up as outside midfielders but tended to drift centrally allowing the outside backs to join the attack. This is especially true of Ampaipitakwong, who more or less roamed freely encouraging Sarkodie to venture forward on the right.



Both teams got going quickly after kickoff and established a composed passing rhythm. After about 10 minutes, Akron began to take a narrow lead in terms of the possession. Akron was patient in their measured build-up and when UNC won the ball they broke out with speed through Farfan and Dixon. By the later stages of the first half, possession was about a 60/40 split in favor of Akron, but neither team was able to significantly break down the defense of the other. While both teams created some chances to score, 0-0 was an accurate reflection of the first half.

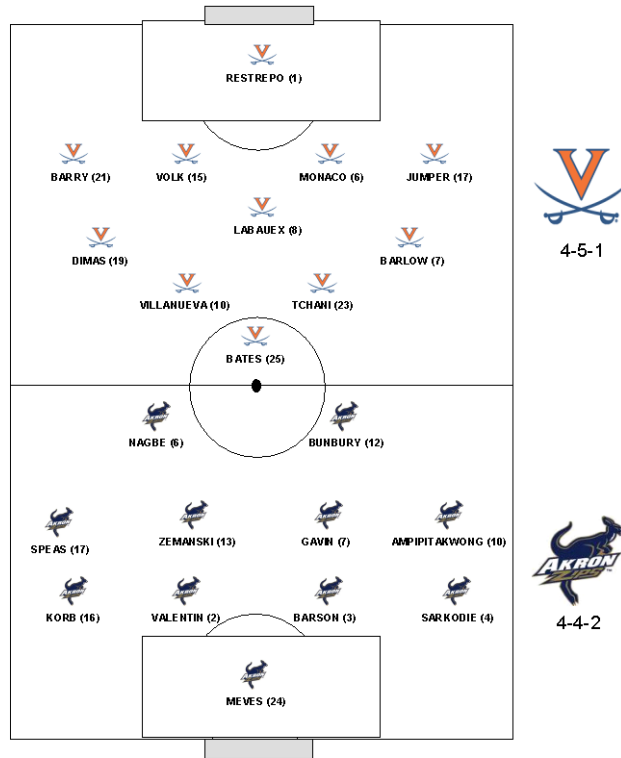
The second half continued much the same as the first. The technical quality and athleticism were impressive and the tempo was consistently high. The 70th minute sending off of a UNC defender sent the flow of play in Akron's direction to an even greater degree. UNC dealt with Akron's attack very well. With an extra man and control of play, Akron was still unable to put away UNC. Carolina stood up through the remainder of regulation and both overtime periods, but Akron prevailed on PK's by converting all 5 from the spot.

The Final

VIRGINIA vs. AKRON

With Akron just one win away from completing the perfect season, some may have thought the game itself was a formality. Rather than waiting for the ax to fall, Virginia came out flying. The Cavaliers put Akron on their back foot straight from the first whistle with a predominantly vertical attack that pushed the Zips deep into their own half. UVA's tremendous defensive pressure in the opening 10 minutes did not let Akron breathe when they won the ball. Ampaipitakwong was first to find his composure for Akron, but Nagbe and Bunbury were not allowed much freedom from tight marking. After about 20 minutes of disruptive pressing, UVA sank back to form a 40 yard crease around their goal. The Cavs made that crease a fortress and did not seem bothered as Akron began to monopolize possession of the ball in midfield. Virginia broke out dangerously when they won the ball and created many more real chances to score than Akron.

In the second half it was becoming more and more clear that Akron needed something unpredictable to find a way to get behind the defense. With disciplined marking and good tackling, Virginia was able to effectively contain Akron's short passing attack. Not to end abruptly, but that's pretty much that. Solid performances from both sides and Virginia won on penalties.



Talking Points

THE MAIN DISTRACTION

Virginia conceded a goal in the semi-final vs. Wake Forest when Corbin Bone dribbled along the end line to score. The goal was the first that Virginia had conceded in 13 games dating back to a 3-1 win over ACC rivals Virginia Tech in mid-October. A lot of hype surrounded Virginia's consistently clean score sheets and the performance of goalkeeper Restrepo. 1,176 minutes and 51 seconds without allowing a goal, breaking a record previously set by former Virginia and U.S. National Team GK Tony Meola. That's a lot of psychological baggage for a player to strap to his back and carry around during a game. "To have Wake score on us was probably the best thing that could have happened," said Virginia defender Mike Volk. "We could now get rid of the pressure of the record that had been building up over the course of the season." With their streak out of the picture, Virginia was able to narrow their focus.

Entering the Final, Akron was the talk of Division I Men's college soccer. Akron recorded 19 shutouts and allowed only 7 goals all season - none of which came in the NCAA tournament. Looking back we have to say that Akron was a very entertaining team to watch. It may be that the Akron players were unable to manage the pressure of trying to play their way into history.

In terms of winning the championship, Akron's flaw was in not taking enough risk in the attacking third of the field. They were a fluid passing team. If they were a little short on creativity in the final, the loss of Ampaipitakwong certainly made matters worse. It seemed they over-valued possession of the ball when some variation through second range shots and early crosses might have paid opened some doors. In the end, Akron did not ask enough questions of their opponents' defenses.

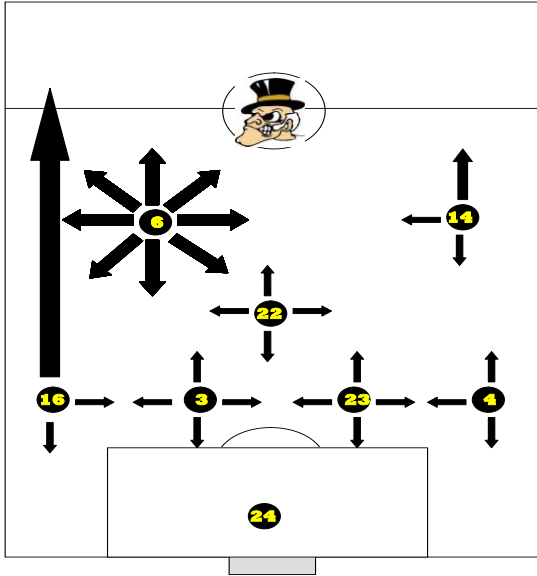
FAILURE TO LAUNCH

While it was refreshing to see college teams so committed to playing with quality, we have to call attention to the limited use of the crossing pass. Akron, as previously mentioned, was often guilty of over-working their attacks. Against UNC, Akron served a few dangerous balls over the top, but refused to cross balls into the box until finally Sarkodie began to send in a steady stream toward the end of the game. For the most part, Akron chose to interrogate their opponents with casual repetition of the same questions, and the bad cop didn't report for duty. Wake Forest played mostly on the ground, but the few times they did take to the sky they caused UVA some problems. Wake needed to keep pressing that button. When a question is not asked, it usually goes unanswered.

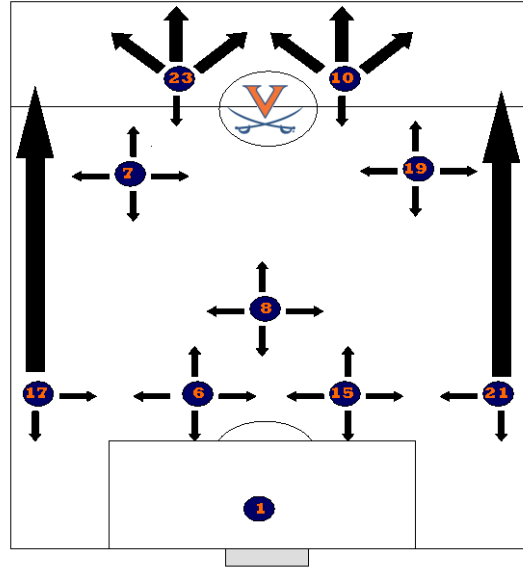
UNC threatened Akron twice from corners and a few other times with high balls that Meves had to swat away. Maybe it was because they couldn't break through on the ground, but UNC was the more effective team from crosses. In the opening minutes of the final, Virginia's Hunter Jumper whipped a cross to Will Bates, whose near-post header came back off the post. Possibly the best scoring chance in the final came from a cross for Virginia's Tony Tchani, but he couldn't steer his header down on target. Of all the teams, Virginia was the most willing to attempt to find players with crosses.

There were certainly chances from crosses, but these four teams were unusually reluctant to cross the ball and too frequently missed the mark when they did. Much as the spectators (and the servers) tend to lay blame on the finish, the fault often rests (quite literally) at the feet of the server. A cross is a pass like any other and must be considerate of its target in terms of accuracy, weight, and timing. Poor crosses are a wasted attack at best, and sometimes an invitation to defend your opponent's counter-attack with a sixty yard sprint. But when the skill and its execution are mastered, and you can lay it on a plate for the finisher, crosses bring a deadly dimension to your team's attack. As a nation attempting to raise our stature internationally we must develop players with the ability to serve crosses with quality. If you can't pass, you can't play. Taking into account the tendency of the four goalkeepers to start close to the line, outswinging crosses from a wide position might have been an excellent solution to attacking the space behind defenders. Sometimes you have to throw them a curve.

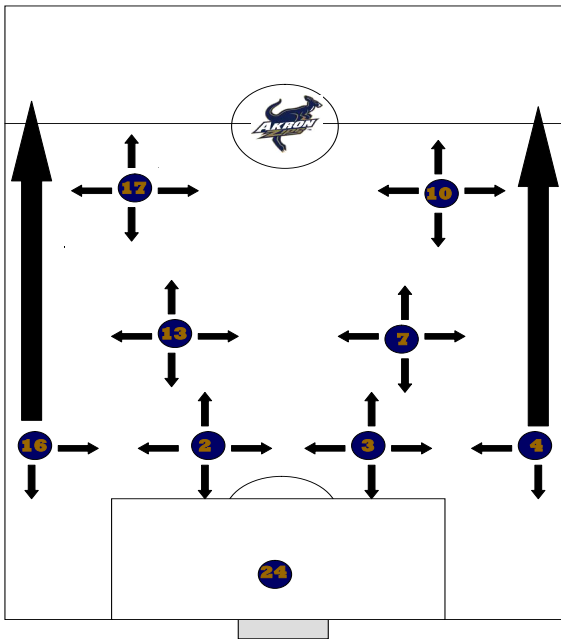
THE BACK FOUR (IN PICTURES)



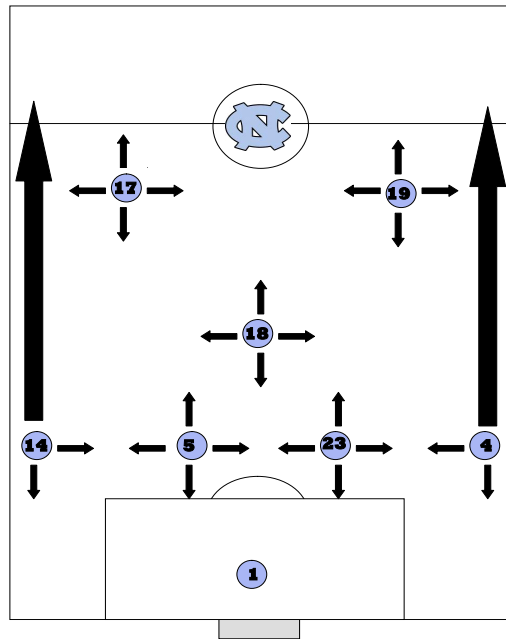
Wake's midfield general DaLuz (6) roamed freely throughout midfield. The road was clear for left back Adams (16) to take the space created by DaLuz' departure. Not quite the same story on the other side....Lichtfuss (4) had very few opportunities to come forward as Norman (14) tended to 'stay home' more often.



Outside backs Jumper (17) and Barry (21) got forward with more confidence in the final vs. Akron delivering numerous dangerous crosses.



Akron's Ampi (10) and Speas (17) tended to float in midfield drifting centrally as they looked to find the ball. This allowed backs Korb (16) and Sarkodie (4) the occasional opportunities to come forward.



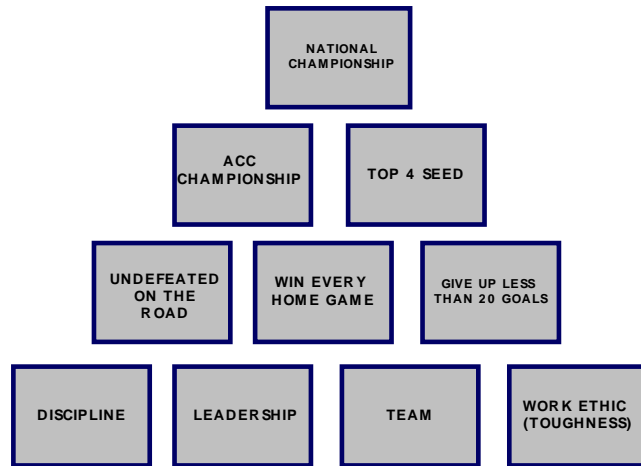
There was more room for UNC backs King (4) and Graye (14) to get forward as Farfan (19) and Urso (18) had free reign in midfield.

Defense Wins Championships

Virginia Center Back Mike Volk

Question: What was focus of team throughout season?

Volk: To win a National Championship. The coaching staff had a pyramid of goals in which we modeled our season around (inset). At the bottom of the pyramid we listed our team values and how we were going to identify ourselves. Then we listed our team goals. One of those goals was to give away less than 20 goals all season. Our back line made a decision that we could improve upon that number. Our goal was to give away fewer than ten. We finished the season allowing 7 regular season goals and only gave away one goal to Wake Forest in the post season.



Question: Did the focus of team leading into Final 4 change compared to the regular season?



PHOTO: Jim Daves

Volk: No.

The game plan stayed the same. Obviously, we knew that these games were bigger and more was on the line. The coaching staff did a very good job of keeping us focused and not allowing outside distractions get in our way.

Question: The first half of the semi-final, Wake Forest dominated the play. What was the halftime speech during that game?

Volk: The players were on their heels. Wake were really coming at us – even more so than the first two games we faced them during the season. Coach Gelnovatch was confident and not worried at all. He filled us with tons of confidence knowing we were not going to catch any breaks. He demanded that our back four just keep grinding. We made no real tactical changes. The over-riding message was ‘We don’t care how we were going to win it.....just win it.’

Question: Virginia’s posture was more aggressive in the first half of the Final. Did the halftime speech differ from the Wake Forest game?

Volk: Akron was so new to us so it was a bit different from Wake game. We were surprised at times with numbers coming forward. We just stuck to what we knew would allow us to be successful. We would give nothing away in the back and look to attack the flanks once in possession.

The Winning Coach

Question: In the opening moments of the National Championship game, Will Bates had a header hit the post. Playing the No. 1 team in the country in Akron, did that help calm the team down to get such a good chance that early in the game?



PHOTO: Jim Daves

Question: As the game went on, Akron ended up having some good chances of its own. How did it feel to see your team defend so well?

Gelnovatch: Yeah, you hold your breath on a couple of those, but you quickly, quickly let your breath out because you've just got to keep breathing and keep going, that's part of the game. For me the quality opportunities were similar between both teams. I think they had one or two really good looks and we had one or two. Had one team converted those that would have probably been the game.

Question: You have talked about this team being in control of its own destiny, talk about that theme as the weekend progressed.

Gelnovatch: This whole weekend we had been using some stuff from the movie *Invictus* which is a movie but also the name of a poem written by William Ernest Henley which Nelson Mandela would read over and over to himself while he was in prison. I said it after the Wake Forest game, we're on the field still in the huddle, I said it's our destiny to win a National Championship then we followed through with that on Sunday. I really felt like this was predetermined, then we talked about it again going into the final we have control over our own destiny. This is our destiny. Going into the PKs I said to them relax it is determined just take a deep breath let's finish this game and win a championship. You try to calm them down a little bit

Gelnovatch: To be honest with you, in the Maryland game in the quarterfinals for example, we scored on less of a chance in the first five minutes of the game. That had an impact on the game. Had we scored that first goal in that first five minutes, I don't exactly know how it would have played out, but I know how it played out against Maryland when we scored early like that. And I feel like we would have won the game in regulation because I think that is how well we defend. So I think yeah, in answer to your question, when we score early generally we've been pretty good.

As the head coach of a program you try to have your finger on the pulse of your team. I think that the minute we stepped into that locker room I knew our team was in a good place. Confident, not too tight, certainly not over confident, all the right things to be prepared for a championship game and they showed it when the whistle blew.

going into the PKs, try to find them a way to take a deep breath.

Question: When Akron's fifth shooter sailed his shot over the crossbar can you pinpoint who or what you thought about first?

Gelnovatch: To be honest with you I thought it was their sixth shooter, so I thought we had to take another kick to win it and so my first reaction was to keep everybody off the field for two seconds. I thought what's everybody doing? Then Coach Chulis said that was their fifth shooter and then again because of that, I was thinking okay who is our next shooter, Jordan Evans. So to go from that to ... I don't know if euphoria is the right word. It was surreal. It went from just trying to figure out the whole thing to being with the coaching staff, teammates, parents, my wife and kids and then all the people on the field. It was just awesome.

Question: Anything else stand out in your mind about the game or the weekend at the College Cup?

Gelnovatch: I will say that I told the guys before the final on Sunday and I really meant it that coming from a coaching staff that never have coaches wanted something more for you guys. We were going to give our best, our doctors were going to be at their best, our trainers were going to be at their best. We were going to give you our best so that you can become champions.

Conclusions

Everyone who sees a particular game will come away with different conclusions based on their vision. What are your conclusions? Share them and start a conversation.

1. What did you see?
2. What did you learn about soccer/college soccer from watching the final four?
3. Considering the age of the players with whom you predominantly train, how will you use what you have learned in the future preparation of your players?
4. What is the larger truth here? What does the final four tell us about U.S. youth soccer?

Having been through this process ourselves as players and coaches, the authors choose to look at college soccer as a stage of the youth game rather than adult. In no way is that meant as an insult. A 21 year old is a young professional and U-21 is a category for international competitions. Not every college player wants to become a professional, but many players in this country possess the ingredients to continue playing competitively after college and it is a path to pro. Is the college game providing the intensive learning environment that these players require to make the jump to playing professionally? Considering the U.S. youth soccer setup, are we developing too many "followers" and too few "Generals"? High functioning young players in this country become very battle-hardened, but how adaptable are they to playing at a higher level? Did we see some tactical inflexibility that should concern us?

If we did, then at least the error was finally on the side of too much indirect play. That is an improvement.

If you don't like your answers to these questions, then how do we change to help players become better?

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