

Pioneers prime for season with Open Cup game



Goalie Jermaine Fordah socks the ball away.



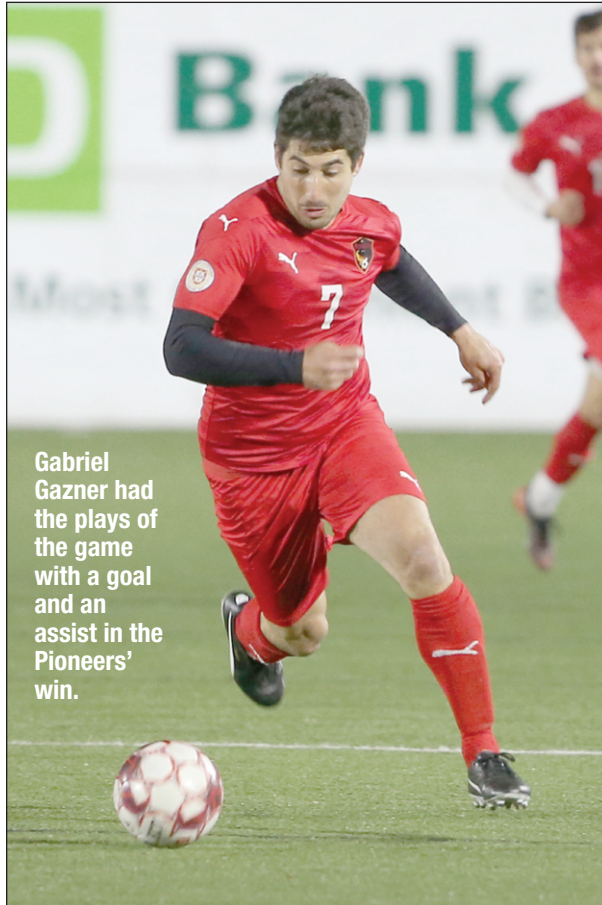
Sidney Warden makes his way up the field.



Shawn Allen attempts to settle the ball.

LUDLOW – Last Wednesday night at Lusitano Stadium, fans got a taste of the new-look Western Mass. Pioneers, which qualified for the Open Cup Series and defeated Brockton FC United 2-0 thanks to a goal and an assist from

Gabriel Ganzer. The Pioneers will next face Flower City Union in the Open Cup on April 6. The USL-2 regular season for the Pioneers opens up on May 11. The Pioneers will have several new players on the team this season.



Gabriel Ganzer had the plays of the game with a goal and an assist in the Pioneers' win.



Monson's Connor Hicks makes a throw-in.

Photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com

Late power play downs T-Birds

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The Springfield Thunderbirds (34-20-5-2) hung tough in a back-and-forth affair, but fell by a final count of 3-2 to the Providence Bruins (30-17-3-6) on Saturday night at the Dunkin' Donuts Center.

For a third straight road contest this week, the Bruins found themselves behind by a goal in the opening period as Justin Brazeau cashed in at point-blank range on a slick pass from Eduards Tralmaks to get the better of Joel Hofer just 1:28 into the action.

Despite the 1-0 deficit, the remainder of the period was littered with Springfield offensive chances. A pair of power plays, including a 1:09 stretch of two-man advantage time, generated numerous scoring opportunities, including a crossbar-ringer from Sam Anas.

With the period winding down, Springfield's continuous pressure on Providence goalie Kyle Keyser finally dented the scoresheet when Luke Witkowski let a slapper go at 17:50 that sneaked through traffic and slipped under Keyser's legs. It was Witkowski's first as a T-Bird in just his second game with the club, getting Springfield back even, 1-1, as the game hit the first intermission.

Witkowski's goal provided a springboard for the T-Birds to catapult to their first lead of the night just 13 seconds into the second. After an icing call was washed out, Matthew Peca intercepted a puck in the left-wing corner and found a cutting Anas in the slot area, and Anas potted his fourth goal in his last four games, his 19th of the season to make it a 2-1 game. A key tipping point in the game came moments later as Nikita Alexandrov broke in all alone on Keyser, but the Providence goalie had the answer to keep the score at 2-1.

Like the T-Birds in the first, the Bruins got their crack at a 5-on-3 power play in the second, and unlike Springfield, the Bruins took advantage when Steven Fogarty beat Hofer with a blistering one-timer from the bottom of the left circle at 12:49 to equalize, 2-2.

Providence's power play came up with the biggest play of the night in the third at the 14:32 mark of the final period. After a jam play at the far post left Hofer and the T-Birds defense desperately trying to freeze the puck, the biscuit came popping out into the slot, where an alert Victor Berglund got to it and wristed it into a mostly-vacant net to give the Bruins the lead for good. Hofer and the T-Birds argued that the netminder did not have a chance to play his position, but the goal stood.

Despite some dangerous looks in the closing minutes, including a point-blank chance for Peca that got knocked away by Bruin defender Aaron Ness right near the goal line, Springfield could not get the game into overtime. It marked just the second time all season that the T-Birds fell in a one-goal game in regulation.

The Bruins now hold the narrowest of leads in the Atlantic Division with a .616 points percentage to Springfield's .615. The two clubs rematch this Friday night at the Dunkin' Donuts Center, with puck drop set for 7:05 p.m.

New player registrations needed in QVOTB League

REGION – The Quabbin Valley Over-28 Baseball League has opened up registration 2022 season. The league plays its games Sundays at 10 a.m. beginning in late April and concluding in late August. It is a six-team league and a 15-game schedule with all teams getting at least one playoff game at the end of August.

The league is seeking new players to join in the fun. The cost to play in 2022 is \$197.68 and registration can be found at www.quabbinvalleybaseball.org. Games are mostly being played this year in Easthampton and South Hadley. Players who wish to pitch in the league must be 30-years-old.

There are several open roster spots on teams heading into the spring. Anyone interested in playing is welcome, but pitchers and catchers are especially needed on

teams.

Sign-ups are active and players who are not already on a team will be placed in a draft, currently scheduled to take place on Sunday, April 10. New this year, players who are new or seeking to switch teams through the draft will be able to participate in a tryout. The tryout is currently scheduled for the same morning as the draft. Team managers will observe the tryout and then be able to draft at the tryout's conclusion.

The league's first games are tentatively scheduled for Sunday, April 24. The league allows the use of BBCOR-certified -3 bats as well as wood bats. Games are nine innings and all players who participate get to hit and play the field. For more information or to contact someone from the league, go to the league's website.

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ending the season with the championship. Bello's Tour-Type Modified experience might be a bit limited, but look for this youth talent to have a goal of finishing all the laps and trying to get to the front in the final circuits.

On the other side, rising star Teddy Hodgdon proved in February he would be a threat in the Tour-Type Modified ranks for 2022. As a former Thompson winner in the SK Lite Modifieds and former champion of the division over at Stafford, Hodgdon went to New Smyrna Speedway's World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing and finished inside the podium in the championship standings for the week. At one of the toughest tracks, in his debut Modified starts, Hodgdon competed against some of the best. Now, he's hoping to carry that confidence and momentum back to New England at the Icebreaker.

"Definitely exciting to head back to Thompson, especially with the recent history of success for our family-owned team," Hodgdon said. "Thompson is always a super fun track to run, and I can't wait to start the season up north on high

note. The track is pretty tricky when you get started. It's a very line-sensitive track on where you can run, but once you find your footing it can be rewarding against the competition. I think I've grown a lot there since my first laps."

Like Bello, Hodgdon wants to finish all the laps and try to challenge those veteran competitors when the race hits the final laps.

"The goal coming from a great week down at New Smyrna is to continue to grab solid finishes and run up front," Hodgdon said. "If we can do that, we will definitely be up there when it counts most. All of us are just excited to get the race season officially started."

The Outlaw Open Modified Series teams will be allowed to practice on Friday and Saturday, but all qualifying and feature racing will take place on Sunday.

On Saturday, the Sunoco Modifieds, Pro All Star Series, EXIT Realty Trucks, Mini Stocks and NEMA Lites will qualify and race to kick-off Icebreaker weekend. Sunday, the Thompson Late Models, Limited Sportsman and SK Lite Modifieds will join the Outlaw Open Modified Series to wrap the weekend.