

Victorious Gill St. Bernard's soccer players show respect toward St. Rose opponents after dramatic state final



The boys soccer match between Gill St. Bernard's and St. Rose on Nov. 12 was about as hard-fought and dramatic as one could get.

The play was intense, yet clean, with a tempo befitting of what was on the line - the NJSIAA Non-Public B state championship.

There was no scoring through 80 minutes of play, and the drama picked even more during 20 more minutes of overtime, which ended with the score still 0-0.

That meant the title hopes for both teams would come down to a penalty kick shootout. No matter the level of soccer, there is no greater drama or source of emotion in the sport, especially when the tiebreaker is deciding a championship.

The game that afternoon at Franklin High School was no different. Gill St. Bernard's won the shootout, 3-2, to capture the program's eighth state championship.



Branden Ferreira (19) and Charles Taliano (8) join the Gill St. Bernard's state championship celebration, after first consoling their opponents from St. Rose.

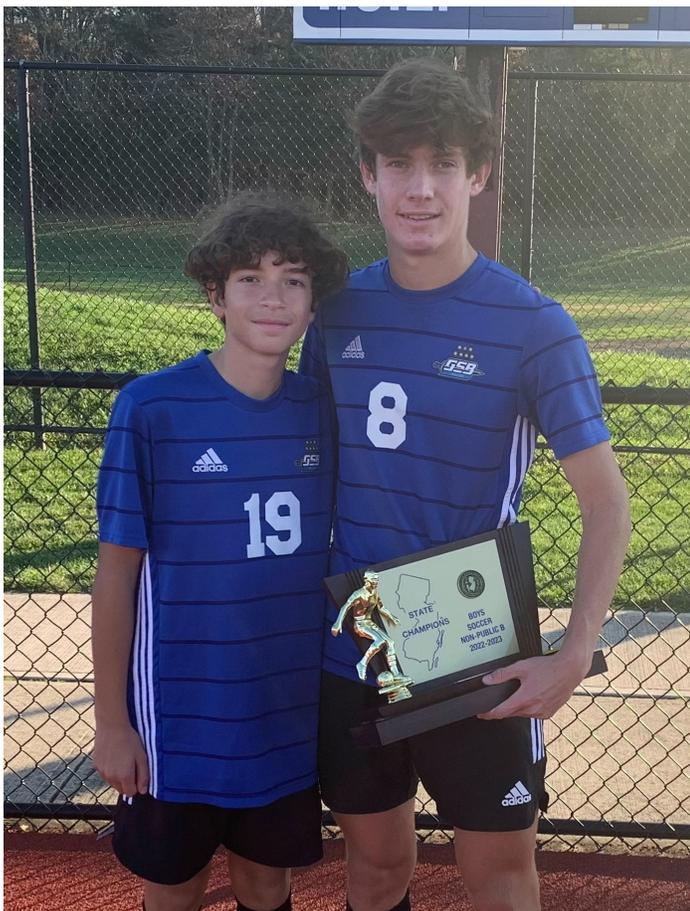
It set off a predictable scene - jubilation on the Gill St. Bernard's side, and heartbreak by the St. Rose bench.

Upon closer look, something very impressive and less expected was taking place.

As the Gill St. Bernard's team was in a tight circle raising the trophy into the air on its side of the field, two of its players - freshman Branden Ferreira and senior captain Charles Taliano - weren't there. Instead, they were at the St. Rose bench, where they deemed it more important to first take a few moments to console the players who they had just battled in the intense, emotional game.

"I was right there and very moved by the whole thing," said Del Dal Pra, the St. Rose athletic director. "Our coaches and players were so dazed and drained, but were touched when they came over."

The two players are also part of a strong family dynamic that has been a component of the Gill St.



Branden Ferreira and Charles Taliano of Gill St. Bernard's pose with the Non-Public B championship trophy.

Bernard's program over the years. Taliano's younger brother, Michael, is a sophomore on the team. And while Ferreira is a ninth grader working his way into the lineup, he's watched his brother Jonathan, a junior, play the last few years for the Knights.

For Taliano, as a leader on the field and off, he knew that reaching over to the St. Rose players was simply a sporting thing to do.

"It's something you never want to go through," he said of the game's final outcome. "They put up a hard battle and they were due some credit. I had to go over there and thank them for how they played. They deserved it."

"I felt so bad for them," Ferreira said. "They had something in them with the way that they played, and they deserved the credit."

The Gill St. Bernard's players have also experienced being on the losing side of similar games during the course of their soccer careers - all players have - and figure to be there at some point again. And when it does, they know that respect from the other team would be appreciated.

"If I wind up on the other side one day, I would want to be respected that way," Taliano said. "So it was important to show that respect to them."

The conduct of the players was no surprise to Tony Bednarsky, the long-time coach at Gill St. Bernard's.

"They're a class act," he said. "It's something that's kind of within the culture of our kids. We had talked about respecting St. Rose as a team, because they are so organized defensively and were a tough nut to crack. They deserved that."

Bednarsky was proud of each player, especially since one was a senior leader, and the other a freshman with a promising future.

"Charles is that type of kid," he said. "He's a captain and team leader, and in club or somewhere along the line, he's probably been on the other end of it, so he felt for the guys he tangled with. But as a coach, I'm really proud that a freshman would do that. That speaks volumes. With Charles, I'd almost

expect him to do that. But for Branden to do that, it's a pleasant surprise and shows that you'll see him on the field sooner rather than later. Sportsmanship is an important thing for us. We always want to win with class."

It's a point that has resonated with the players.

"A game like that was a dogfight," Taliano said. "But at the end, you have to come together to show respect for the competition. That's what sportsmanship is about."



Charles Taliano (top) of Gill St. Bernard's battles with a St. Rose opponent to gain possession in the Non-Public B championship game. (Photo credit: NJ.com)